JACK RANWORTH

POPULAR NOVELS BY
JAMES BLYTH.
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THE WEIRD SISTERS.
THE AERIAL BURGLARS.
THE ATONEMENT.
A BID FOR LOYALTY.
A HAZARDOUS WOOING.

JACK RANWORTH

BY

JAMES BLYTH

Author of

"The Atonement," "A Bid for Loyalty," etc., etc.

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Dedication.

To V. VYVYAN WILLIAMS, Esq., Mus. Bac., Cantab.

With cordial good will.

JAMES BLYTH.

Cat'g'd
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CHAPTER I

THE FACES OVER THE WALL

JACK RANWORTH eased his favourite chestnut up the winding hill, one of the few really steep hills in East Anglia, and looked about him with some surprise. He thought he knew his county of Daneshire well, but he had never seen or heard of a narrow stony winding road, scarcely more than a bridle path, in this neighbourhood. Behind him, where the dense foliage of the elms and oaks which shaded the way permitted, he saw, by swinging round in his saddle, the marshes and upper reaches of the tortuous Saelig. He could even see the little riverside inn, the *Perch and Gudgeon*, from which he had many a time chartered a boat and taken his bottles of " sweet and mild " when he had come to these parts fishing with Sam Buttle, his father's henchman of the *Belvedere* cutter and the best racing helmsman on the Broads and rivers of Daneshire.

It puzzled him that the place should be so unknown

to him, for it was evidently a district under the control of some genuine old county family. In squireless villages the signs of poverty and neglect are always obvious, while in districts which have recently been acquired by city plutocrats from old county families, the new post and barbed wire fences, and the notices that trespassers will be prosecuted, betray the change of ownership.

"It's a rum 'un," mused Jack. "I thought I knew every inch of the land about here and all the people who held it. By Jove, though!"

He pulled his noble "rixer" to a halt, and the chestnut stood willingly enough, for the rise was steep and the day was hot. Jack remembered one of his father's tales of the county, and the old gentleman was recognized as an authority on county families and traditions. "It must be General Blunderfield's place," he ruminated. "But I had no idea that he had a park wall eight feet high and topped with broken glass or barbed wire. It ain't like one of the Blunderfields!"

He patted Kitchener's neck (he had called his horse Kitchener at a moment of indiscreet enthusiasm) and loosened his reins till the gallant three-quarter blood was able to reach down and crop at the sweet grass in the hedgerows. Then again he swerved round on his saddle till he looked down the

steep to the *Perch and Gudgeon.* He swung round and stood up in his stirrups, a little painfully, for he was not yet wholly cured of his wound, and to the south-west was able to see the square tower of the famous church of St. Mary's on the Fen. An interest began to tingle in him, though he did not know why. His nerves were tense with expectation as he again settled himself on the pigskin and with a draw on the double reins hinted to Kitch that he might proceed.

"Good God! what's that?" he cried, as his horse started and raised his noble head.

Over the eight-foot wall which bordered the narrow way on the left, as Jack rode, came a horrible cry. It was loud, near by, human in its vibrations, yet scarce human because of its ghastly suggestion of animalism, of the utter want of human intelligence.

Jack wore no spurs, but he pressed his heels to Kitchener's sides. The horse seemed to nod his head in comprehension and at once improved his pace, though he was too wise a steed to attempt to trot on so steep and so stony an ascent.

Scarce had the horrible inarticulate yell ceased to thrill through the thick trees of the winding avenue of the ascent, when another cry was heard. A girl's voice—the sweetest Jack had ever heard, despite

the terror of it, and the intensity of its appeal—cried aloud through the glamour of that summer morning golden air.

"Oh, help! Mercy! I can't bear this! I can't! Princess, order your men to save me. Princess!"

"Well," thought Jack to himself, "this ain't no perishin' Arabia, as my man used to say, but—well! There ain't a word!"

At the call of the second voice the horse had thrown discretion to the winds and had started into a canter, as safer than a trot up the rise, which was rapidly developing into a gallop.

"Steady on, old chap," said Jack, bending forward over his steed's withers and soothing him. "Steady on. Don't break our necks, old boy."

Kitchener gathered speed and swung round a sharp bend at a dangerous pace. "Easy there, easy," urged Jack, taking hold of his horse's mouth. "Good lord!"

Over the wall to the left the head and neck of a girl were straining. The simple blouse which she wore was torn by the barbed wire, her hair was disordered and loosened from its pins by the boughs and rose sprays which were thick within the brick barrier. She was plainly endeavouring to climb over the wall, and her expression was that of a

person at the extremity of terror, and—yes, more than terror—of disgust, of loathing.

Jack hardly had the need to draw on his snaffle. Some horses are instinctively wise, and the chestnut was one of them. He eased his pace and came to a stop underneath the spot where the girl's face was struggling to rise higher above the wall.

And, as he stopped, the horrible, meaningless, inarticulate yell sounded close and menacing near by.

"Hold on, hold on, do please," cried Jack, as he saw the girl's flesh torn and bleeding from her effort to escape. "I'm here now, you know."

Why his presence should be so entirely reassuring he did not know. One thing only he knew then and for ever. That the girl he saw before him, terrified, disordered, bleeding, was the only girl who had ever touched his heart-strings. Many and many a girl had he joked with, flirted with. He was a handsome youth, full-blooded, before he had shed some of that blood for his country, and an average young gentleman of position. He had often told himself that he knew all about women. He was inclined to despise them, to consider them as on a lower scale of evolution than the male of their species. But now! Who was she, this peerless girl whose beauty was the greater from her disarray,

whose voice was the more musical because of its terrified appeal ?

Perhaps that is hardly exact. Jack did not ask who she was. He felt once and for ever that if she wanted his help she would have it. If he could spare her a moment's suffering by a year's torture in a Prison of "Kultur" he would be glad to do it.

Most men have felt love at first sight once at least in their lives. I refer to men who are men and not stuffed figures, popinjays, nor emaculate "highbrows." But in many cases the love at first sight dies as quickly as it is born. Jack had not previously experienced the extraordinary nervous whirlpool, the vortex of his personal world. But he experienced it then, and the whirlpool was the swifter, its swerving currents the deeper and more powerful, because this strange stroke of emotional frenzy had left him untroubled till he was six-and-twenty years of age.

He had believed that he would never be subjected to that intense longing, that irrational attraction for and towards a girl—he, who was rather inclined to consider that he was girl-proof ! And yet here he was smitten down, at the first sight, a tremulous, not lover, but servant, slave, of this girl of whom he knew nothing beyond the fact that her face was sufficient to enchant him. He remembered, even

at that moment of annoyed rapture, the stories of the East, those old stories of the Arabs which need so much deletion to render them possible for British readers. He had always regarded the tales of Aladdin, of Hasan of El-Basrah, and of Bedr Basim and Joharah as so many fairy tales, in which the falling in love at first sight was as much a fable as the intervention of the Jinns. But now!

"Wait!" he cried again. "Wait! For God's sake, wait! I will give my life to save you!"

He felt himself an ass while he cried. He, barely recovered from the severe wounds he had received at the second battle of Ypres—he, alone by himself on the further side of the eight-foot glass and barbed wire defended wall, to offer to give his life for the owner of a face he had not seen five minutes ago! But he could not help it. The face, and perhaps the voice, had enslaved him. He loved the owner of the face still in his sight and the voice which he had heard—at once, and—ah, fortunate and devout youth!—for ever!

Well, perhaps even for a young man of his age there was some excuse. We are, all of us who are higher than brutes, subject to the song in a woman's word, a poem in a woman's face. And few of us have more justification for the surrender of our wits, our heart and our very existence to the fascina-

tion of the dear one who makes life worth living to the man who loves her, than had Jack Ranworth.

The face which had enthralled him was as perfect a specimen of Daneshire beauty—than which there is none more exquisite—as could be found. It was a little longer than the perfect oval, and the nose was a little fuller in the nostrils than that of the Louvre Venus. But otherwise the contour of her cheeks was beyond all artistic or passionate criticism. A noble broad brow rose to the embrace of her glowing turban of red-wheat hair (no low forehead of the unintelligent animal woman for a Daneshire beauty !) ; while from the level of her great magnificent eyes, which ranged in colour from black to violet, but were never lighter than the latter, the sweep of her features fell with full and even beauty to the bud of a full, rounded chin. On each side of her chin nestled a dimple which lurked secretively till she smiled, and then the twin delights dipped in the splendour of her face in sheer modesty of their allurement. Her cheek-bones were scarcely seen beneath her delicious pale russet and apricot surface. Her ears were tiny, transparent as porcelain, glimmering with pulsation till they glowed with dainty colour.

Her mouth was of medium size, but full lipped, the upper lip short and caressing, the lower meeting

the upper as though proud of its position. The glowing hair curled round the neck and little gleaming tendrils let the sun flicker through them behind her ears on the narrow line of wild rose skin which she allowed to be seen above the neck of her blouse. The effect of the ruddy golden eyelashes over those great fathomless dark eyes is never seen but where Scandinavian blood has mingled with Icenian. Even in Daneshire it is rare to find a daughter of the gods so divinely fair as was the girl who struck to the heart of Jack Ranworth with the inexorable certainty of a bullet from an automatic pistol.

At the sound of Jack's voice the girl hesitated in her attempt to escape. She let her eyes withdraw from the barbed wire on the wall on which they had been fixed, and for a moment the young man and young girl looked each other full in the eyes. Jack's heart gave a great leap of emotion. "Hold on," he repeated. "Do please hold on."

But the girl cast her eyes down behind her and her face blanched and shrunk pitifully with terror. "Catch me!" she cried, again struggling to surmount the barbed wire and tearing her hands and forearms in the effort till Jack could have wept at her pain.

"You don't know," she cried. "Oh, help, try to catch me."

She scrambled up till her waist line was level with the top of the wall, and then Jack heard a sound of a great weight moving brusquely, a sound of kicks against the wall, and of bestial grunts and snorting breaths.

He coaxed his horse close under the wall exactly beneath the place where the lovely head appeared over it.

And before the girl could get a knee upon the two-foot brick surface of the wall he saw a dusky, swollen knuckled hand, with a horrible appearance of deformity, grip the bricks close by the face. He had hardly realized the horror of this climbing hand when a face reared high above the enclosure, a face which struck chill to his heart.

He had seen the faces of many Indian tribes in France and Flanders. He knew the stern majesty of the Pathans, the bright, Chinese-like, laughing faces of the Ghurkas, the softer, kind-eyed, classical-featured faces of the North-Western men. He realized that there was something Indian about the face of horror which appalled him. But it was such a face as he had never seen, and hoped, in his foolish disbelief in horrors in Daneshire, never to see again. It was a simian face, but a brutalized simian face. The lips were thin, the nose blunt and with wide protruding nostrils, the cheek-bones high and very

prominent, the ears huge, and pointed at the upper ends. The chin thrust out like that of a chimpanzee, and the rest of the face retreating from it as with that species of ape.

The complexion was fully as dark as that of a Ghurka, indeed darker, and the wide mouth was open, showing hideous fangs.

"Good God!" cried Jack, thrusting his hand behind him to his hip pocket, and cursing when he found he had forgotten to bring his favourite ·320 Webley and Scott. "What is it?"

And then he saw that the most ghastly thing about this horror was its eyes. These were small, with lashless lids and browless, and were of a hue such as may be seen when stagnant water has stood in an iron or zinc vessel for some days, an appalling green with shooting rays of bronze in them as though the stagnant water were disturbed by some noxious water animalcules.

While he looked at this thing it again opened wide its unsavoury jaws and howled.

"Jump!" cried Jack to the girl. "Jump! I'll catch you."

Her fall would have been slight to his arms as he sat on his gallant rixer, and the horse seemed to understand what was happening, for he stood stock-still, his head lifted as though he, too, sought for

the sight of the girl thrusting her way over the wall.

But before anything further happened a coarse voice shouted from near by, and the sound of a cracked whip struck upon the air. The monster's face changed at once to an expression of cunning and terror. While, as Jack, standing up in his stirrups, noticed with some surprise, the girl's face looked almost equally disturbed.

"Crack!" came again the whip, and the sound was followed by a howl of pain from the monster, and the disappearance of the hideous head from the top of the wall.

"And come you down too, miss," said the coarse voice. "The Princess won't be best pleased to hear as I found ye climbin' top o' the wall."

The girl raised herself an inch or two and beckoned eagerly to Jack to go. But he could not obey her. He spoke a word to Kitchener and the horse stood like stone, while his master hoisted himself to his feet on the saddle, steadying himself against the wall. "Listen," he said in a low tone to the girl. "I'll go now. But I will be here again to-morrow at the same time. If there is any way in which I can help you, you may trust me. I'll treat you like a sister till I save you from this horror which threatens you."

The sound of struggling, of whip lashes and

inhuman howls, mixed with very human curses, gave Jack hope that he could say a few words more without fear of compromising the girl in the eyes of the unseen person she seemed to fear.

And then, even at that dramatic moment, Jack saw the girl's eyes dance and gleam with allurement. Oh! how beautiful she was! how dainty! Into what mystery had he fallen?

"You'll promise to go if I make you a sign," said the girl, looking down on him with dancing eyes.

"I'll promise anything to you," said Jack with the fervour of a springing love. "Can I do nothing now?"

"No, but—but I will try to thank you to-morrow."

"Are you comin' down, miss?" said the coarse voice, the owner of which now seemed to have subdued the thing with the animal face and insane eyes. "Or shall I have to tell the Princess as I saw ye atop o' the wall?"

Jack's face flushed with fury. "Can't I thrash that brute?" he asked.

But the girl now seemed frightened. "No, no," she said in a low voice. "To-morrow."

"But I must see you——" Jack began, when his speech was rendered futile by the abrupt disappearance of the girl's head and shoulders.

"If ye won't come I shall have to pull ye down," said the coarse voice. "Blarm! If you aren't almost as much trouble as one o' *them*."

Jack restrained himself with difficulty from leaping over the wall, weak as he still was. But he took cheer to hear the sweet voice reply, "But, Hale, what would the Princess say if she knew you had left your charge? Don't you think you had better beg me to be silent about the danger I have undergone through your neglect?"

"You'd never go to ruin a poor man, miss," said the coarse voice, now very humble and cringing. "I was only jokin' when I spoke as I did to ye! For God's sake, miss, don't ye go to tell the Princess."

"I shall see," replied the sweet voice of the girl. "But if ever you are so impertinent to me again as you were just now I shall tell the Princess what has happened."

The voices grew indistinct as Jack heard the movement of people passing through brushwood and undergrowth. He felt less anxious since he had learnt that the lovely girl had reduced the owner of the coarse voice to submission and that the latter had regained control over that horrible thing which he, Jack, began to believe must be some monster, some unfortunate insane freak of nature.

And there was the girl's promise that she would see him to-morrow.

He settled down again into his seat. "Easy on, old son," he said to his horse. "We'll have a good steady ride. I begin to think that the sooner I get back all my strength the better it will be, and you'll help as well as any one, won't you, boy?"

He bent forward and stroked his horse's neck. The chestnut tossed his head and whinnied, and bore on his rider as gently as though he knew he carried a man recovering from wounds.

Jack let his horse carry him up the narrow winding way till the road swung round the end of the barrier wall of the mysterious house. Here there was a main road, stretching boldly in a full width of tarred highway which ran along the eight-foot wall which still continued till it came to a magnificent pair of wrought-iron gates, giving ingress to a neglected-looking drive, winding between flowering shrubs and dwarf hollies and yews. The drive was too crooked to permit any view of the house. But over the tops of the shrubs, and taller laburnums and lilacs, fancy firs and mountain ash trees, the white walls of a house could be seen from the road. It seemed to be a rectangular, two-storied, rambling building of some size, but not of sufficient importance to justify the height of the wall, or the extent of the

grounds enclosed. There was something secretive about the place which Jack did not like. And he puzzled his brains to understand how it was that he, who was Daneshire born and bred, whose father was a repository of Daneshire county gossip and scandal, should never have heard of this eerie hall begirt with an eight-foot wall which must enclose two or three hundred acres, and within which a tragic mystery was being played out.

He rode slowly past the great and beautiful gates, and looked his keenest through them. But there was nothing to observe save a suggestion of neglect. The wide carriage drive was weedy, the borders contained as many blossoming weeds as garden flowers. Fifty yards within the gates a spruce had fallen on an outreaching bough of a pine, and hung there, at an angle of forty-five degrees, dying, its spines brown in death, its bark paling from the ruddy tint beneath the grey bark to a regular morbid ash tint.

Jack was too shrewd to halt his horse as he rode slowly past the gates. He did not know what strange eyes might be upon him. The sound of that animal howl, the sight of that horrible lunatic face, dark with the hue of another hemisphere, warned him that he had to do with something other than the ordinary county scandal, and that he would be

wise to walk delicately in the way which he was determined to follow.

Jack rode past the rounding wall till the main road swung towards Trawlhaven. Then he halted and looked about him; as he had no wish to be troubled to show his papers and passes to the naval authorities who, very rightly, if somewhat tardily, were trying to prevent German spies from taking photographs and making plans which had all been taken and made years before the outbreak of war in the sight and to the knowledge of many East Anglians who had warned the authorities in vain again and again of the system of espionage which was conducted so perfectly and so easily throughout Daneshire year after year during the period between 1900 and 1914.

Jack sighted certain church towers and factory chimneys at Trawlhaven as he looked from the end of the mysterious enclosure, and knew where he was.

"It's funny," he said to himself, "I never happened to ride up that bridle path before. But I ought to know the place. I'll ask the governor when I see him."

He knew now that a ride of a mile or so further on would bring him to a turn which would take him to St. Mary's on the Fen, where he had decided to put up. He had had certain goods sent on to the

King's Head at St. Mary's, and, as he rode towards that fine old town, he determined that it might be useful if he sent for something more.

So, on his easing his horse to a walk through the market place of the town he guided him to the post office, a few yards past the ancient hostel, the *King's Head.*

He entered the office after a word to his horse, and sent a telegram to his man young Bob Mallett, at Chittenham Hall, his father's family seat.

"Mallett Junior, Chittenham Hall, Chumpingham. Bring car to-morrow to *King's Head*, St. Mary's on the Fen. Bring Webley two or three and plenty of feed. Tell Buttle bring *Belvedere* up to Mary's with *Dragon-fly*."

If this seems cryptic it is easily enough explained by pointing out that although Jack loved a horse above all machinery he appreciated the charms and especially the capacities of a high-power car, and had at last persuaded his father to buy a 60-h.p. Rolls-Royce from a peer who had gone to the front. The Webley meant an automatic pistol of which there were two or three at Chittenham Hall; the "feed" of course signified cartridges: the *Belvedere* was the racing cutter; and the *Dragon-fly* was a very fast motor-boat or hydro-plane engined by

Snooks of Trawlhaven, more like a waterplane than a motor-boat, which old Sam Buttle, the best pilot on the East Anglian waters and the finest racing skipper, had, after a great deal of persuasion from the boy he loved, been induced to learn to work and steer. There was no greater evidence of Jack's charm and popularity among the men of the rivers and broads than that he should have persuaded Sam, the famous and noble-hearted Sam, to forsake the tiller, the jib sheet and the mainsheet to steer what he called a "stinkin' tin-pot b'iler kettle" along his beloved reaches. But Jack knew that Sam loved him and would obey him. And the wounded hero had come to believe that it might serve him to have means of swift movement both ashore and on the water.

The Mallett mentioned was the grandson of Jack's father's coachman. Old Bob, the grandsire, had departed this life when Jack was a boy and been succeeded by his son Bob, who was now close on sixty. Jack had tried to persuade the old man to learn the workings of the Rolls-Royce, but in vain. "I'll keep your horses right and tight same as father did," said the old chap; "but I won't hev nothin' to do with them devil's contraptions. If you can get my son Bob to do it you may willin' and welcome. He's a reckless young fool he is;

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always wanting to be better than his father and his grandfather. I reckon it's them schools as did it. But there he is. He's groom under me at present as ye know, Master Jack. But if ye like I won't say anything against him learning to wind the handle and screw up the nuts o' that stinkin' threshing machine as you seem to like better than a good horse."

Jack had laughed at the old coachman's prejudice, but found that young Bob, though he loved a horse more than he could love an engine, was willing and eager to learn the mysteries of the Rolls-Royce. The consequence was that, after a few lessons at a good place, young Bob was as competent a repairing engineer and a driver as many a town oaf who had been at the work for thrice the time he, young Bob, had devoted to it. And, because he still loved a horse better than an engine, even such an engine as that of the superb Rolls-Royce, Jack liked him all the better.

Moreover with Sam Buttle and young Bob Mallett he would have a small but trustworthy force, each of whom would die for him as readily as the men he had led at La Bassée ; and his experiences in the war had taught him what it meant to have a follower "faithful unto death" at one's bidding.

The only difficulty lay in the fact that young

Bob longed to join up. That he should join up was inevitable. But, just then, in the spring of 1915, when there were still so many slackers about the greater part of England, though few in Daneshire, Jack thought that he was doing no harm in summoning this young sportsman of the marshland country to the aid of a fair maiden in distress. After the mystery of the Walled-in House was solved, then Bob could go and do his duty as a sniper as none but Daneshire poachers could. Perhaps by then the Army doctors would let him, Jack, return to the front, though they had declared that he would never again be fit for work in the fighting line.

At any rate, the charm which the girl's face had exercised over him and the new feeling of—of indefinable longing, of chivalrous devotion which the fair face over the wall had inspired in the convalescent young hero, might work out their own problem within a few weeks.

The weather was delightful, the country such as he loved with the love of an understanding native, and the charm of the girl as alluring as the mystery in which she seemed to be involved.

Jack had felt stronger and with a new interest in life as he let his horse jog along quietly towards the dam over the marshes which led to the bridge into St. Mary's on the Fen.

Within the Walled-in House, a girl was crouching on her knees, her hands pressed against the door of her room, while, without, in the long corridor at the end of which her rooms were situated, there came every now and then the horrible yowls, shrieks, and semi-articulate shouted jargon which had struck cold to the heart of a man who had faced the Huns' shells without flinching.

CHAPTER II

JACK AND HIS PROBLEM

AFTER his simple but very tasty dinner at the *King's Head*, Jack lit a Cortinay and lay back in his easy chair to think.

The dinner had been to his taste, as it would have been to the taste of any wholesome Daneshire man. A two-pound fried silver-bellied eel, followed by a steak from a Daneshire bullock cut two inches thick and grilled till it had the savour of burnt meat outside, and within a stratum of gushing red tenderness. Followed by a ripe Daneshire " box cheese " which gave a smack to the sound brown ale of the house. The meal put Jack at his ease so much that even the cup of abominable coffee inevitable in the provinces, was unable to disturb the internal complacency of the convalescent.

As the flavour of the fine tobacco soothed his nerves and aided his digestion Jack's mind grew more alert.

" I'm as much a stranger here," he said to himself,

" as if I were in Devon. And these people at the Walled-in House, whoever they are, are no doubt local big pots. I shan't get a native of this neighbourhood to help me, though old Peter Young knows me well enough from my yachting and fishing trips up here. I've sent for young Bob Mallett to bring the car. He'll like bringing her and be the more pleased by the notion that he will be able to teach the ostler here how to look after Kitchener. I'd like to hear what his father says though when his son gets the order to bring what the old man calls the steam ingyne ! Young Bob, fond as he is of horses, drives well and has picked up the mechanism wonderfully. It is extraordinary how the fidelity of some families to the county folk will outlast every trial. Unless we had been squires of Chittenham for generations young Bob would have given notice rather than attempt to learn how to drive and repair the car. Gad ! It's a pity this old mutual interest is dying out year by year ! "

Jack leant back in his chair and thought over the lessons he had learnt as a boy from the representatives of families who had been villeins of the Ranworths for two or three centuries. How faithful, how careful had they been ! How well had the keeper taught him to shoot, the water bailiff to fish, Bob Mallett's father to ride and drive. And

then—yes, by Jove! There was Sam Buttle, the best yacht hand on the Daneshire waters who had taught him to swim, scull, hand and reef and steer. He felt sure that he was right to have the *Belvedere* and *Dragon-fly* up at St. Mary's. Circumstances might intervene which would make escape by water easier than by land. He would have Sam and the *Belvedere*, and the motor launch *Dragon-fly*, as well as Bob and the car. And with Sam and Bob he would feel as though he had an army behind him.

"I 'spose I'm makin' an ass of myself," he mused. "I've only seen the girl once, and it's quite on the cards that she is as right as rain. But that howl! And that face! And the girl's own expression and evident terror! And she said she'd try to meet me to-morrow!"

He smoked a few moments longer, then took his cup of black coffee and carefully emptied it into the coal scuttle. He wished to talk to old Peter Young and did not desire to hurt the old boy's feelings. Everything but the coffee had been excellent. And any one who expects to get decent coffee at a Daneshire inn deserves what he does get. The home-made curaçoa was nearly as good as *Grand Marnier*, so soft and luscious had its years made it. Only the coffee had been a failure. But if old Peter saw his full cup he would begin to worry and ask

what was the matter. He could not explain. No Daneshire country innkeeper and very few of the hotel managers at Odinton knew what a cup of coffee, fresh roasted, fresh ground, and made with boiling water, meant.

When the wretched liquid had gone to its own place in the coals Jack pulled at the old-fashioned long-tasselled bell line.

Presently old Peter, who had been anticipating an invitation to participate in a glass of wine and a gossip, came toddling in.

"We'll have a bottle of the 1870 port, Peter," said Jack, "unless you prefer anything else."

"Now am I a fool, master?" asked old Peter. "Have I got anythin' so good as that there port in my cellar? Or have any one got better? Hold you on. I'll fetch it."

Old Peter Young was a well-known character in that part of Daneshire. He was accepted on familiar terms by many of "the real old gentry," and he never took liberties such as he knew would be offensive. Jack had known him for years, and his (Jack's) father had known him too since he went yachting and fishing up the Saelig to St. Mary's as a boy. For Peter was heavy with years, and was nearer eighty than seventy.

When the hearty old boy returned bearing the

wine in its cradle as carefully as if it were fulminate of silver, he beamed. It was long since he had tasted of his own prime vintage, though he could remember the days when it was the ordinary thing for the gentry on market days to ask him to take his share of a bottle of the best wine in his cellars. Those days were long departed, and the old boy's heart went out to the son of the old stock who seemed inclined to revive the good old custom.

It may be that Jack guessed that he would take this view, for he had made up his mind to seek information from this old innkeeper who, as a rule, was a mine of county gossip.

It was not till old Peter had sucked in his third glass with upturned eyes of ecstasy that Jack touched on the matter he had at heart.

"By the way," said the young man, "I rode up past Smeltrun lock to-day and turned up a winding uphill narrow road which ran along a high brick wall. I don't know the place at all. I rode up under an avenue of elms and oaks, the wall and the road winding all the way till I came to the main road between Herringhaven and Trawlhaven. Whose place is it inside that wall? I ask because while I was riding by I heard the most horrible yells I ever heard in my life, worse even than the Huns' yells when they are frightened; and over the wall

I saw a face—my God! it was the face of a black devil. It reminded me of an illustration to the *Arabian Nights* which Fred Sandys the artist gave my father, where a lop-eared Jinn is drawn. I never saw anything so horrible. And whilst the thing jibbered and foamed at the mouth at me some one caught hold of his legs and pulled him down, and as I rode away I heard thumps and shrieks as if the poor brute were being thrashed with a whip. Who's got the place now?"

Old Peter gulped down what was left in his glass, filled up again and again drained the aromatic wine.

"D'ye mean Smeltby Manor, Master Jack?" he asked. "On the rise against the lock, high bit o' land, highest hereabouts, with the well-known wrought-iron gates from Odinton at the lodge which were shown at the Crystal Palace?"

The old man's face was so disturbed that Jack knew he need not reply to the question. "I see you know where I mean," he said.

"Who lives there now?"

Old Peter rose from his seat, went to the closed door, which he opened swiftly and noiselessly. When he had looked out into the passage leading to the room, he closed the door again and returned.

"Lord, sir," he said, "if any o' my servants were to hear what I'm a goin' to tell ye, I shouldn't keep

'em a day! But I have known your father and your grandfather, and though you are not an East Daneshireman, you're next best, a Nor'-East 'un and one o' the real old county gentry."

Jack filled the old boy's glass again. He did not wish for more wine, and the fine vintage was too good to waste.

Old Peter sipped at the glass, then took an old horn snuff box from his waistcoat pocket and thrust two great pinches up his nostrils. "Ah!" he said, "I wanted that, master. Now I'll tell ye. . . . D'ye know the name of General Blunderfield? Sir Hugo? Him what made his money in India?"

"It's a Daneshire name," replied Jack.

"Ah! And he belongs to the Smeltby Manor, though when his father died he hadn't the money to live at the Manor, and let it to that London spice thief from Mincing Lane—Beere his name was—who owes money all over St. Mary's to this day! Well, when he was a young man with some blood in him, he married Miss Lily Panxworth, and left her living quiet like when he went out to India. She died when her first babe was born, a girl, and the girl was brought up by her mother's father till she married Captain George Palmer. Both o' them went out to India. Then they do say as the General —he was only a colonel then—married an Indian

princess. At all events he brought a wife home some twenty years ago who's never been seen in village or town, road or lane. Colonel Palmer—for he got to be a colonel—and his wife died o' the cholera and left a little girl who came home here to her grandfather, and, so far as I know, is there now."

Old Peter drained his glass and helped himself to another. "Now," he continued, "look see, Master Jack. Since then no one not employed at the Manor has been inside the gates or the walls. There's tales that all the children of the General's second marriage are mad or idiots, and that there's a whole party o' keepers and nurses to look after 'em. Any servant leavin' is taken to the rail and set in the train and seen off without a chance to give a good day. Then there's rum tales about the noises in the place, and of the poor grandchild who they say is as sweet as meadowsweet in early June ! But I don't know anything ; I only tell ye the sayings because you're one o' the real old county gentry who get fewer and fewer every year, worse luck. As for the General—Sir Hugo, as he is now—he hasn't been seen in these parts for six or seven years."

This time the old boy reached out for the bottle rather eagerly. He was a very old man and unac-

customed to the sound potency of the really magnificent wine, of which a bottle was not taken from his cellars twice in the year. And he began to grow flushed and a little garrulous.

But Jack had learnt all he desired to know, for he believed he had heard all the old man had to tell him. He smoked on patiently till Peter had finished the bottle, had added various unimportant details to his previous story, and had been sufficiently overcome by the wine to understand that it would be well for him to seek his bed.

Only one other matter of importance had escaped him during what may be called the third or porty period. It was that "Miss Mary, the general's granddaughter, who lived with her mysterious step-grandmother at the Walled-in House, was beloved by all who had ever had the fortunate chance to see her. These were few, for no casual servants or workpeople were permitted within the Manor, "except my Polly," said old Peter. Tradesmen left their goods at the lodge gates, and all employees had dwellings within the walls. But now and then rumour escaped those high walls, as it will the highest and thickest wall of any secluded house in England, that Miss Mary had done this and that and had acted like the charitable and sympathetic angel she was reputed to be.

All this at once confirmed Jack's intention to rescue the lady of the lovely voice and beautiful face from her unholy surroundings and to summon to his aid all the auxiliary forces at his command. Later on, he told himself, he would, if it were necessary, call in his father, a county magistrate and a man of weight in the county. But as yet he had to feel his ground, to learn the nature of the opposing forces, and, above all, to ascertain if his help would be acceptable to the girl whose image already began to be impressed upon his martial heart.

Well, he had summoned his aides-de-camp, Sam Buttle and young Bob Mallett. The telegram might not be delivered at Chittenham that night, but it would get there fairly early in the morning. And on the morrow he hoped again to see the fair face over the wall.

CHAPTER III

THE EURASIAN

THE morning broke fine and breezy, just such a day as would send the sap of rejuvenating life through the veins of a convalescent, or a young man just escaping from the period of convalescence. Jack woke to hear the bustle of market day at St. Mary's, for it was a Friday, and the country folk had been coming in with their stock and market garden produce for the last three hours.

He had slept well, and dreamlessly, and when he woke he scarce remembered the enterprise to which he had devoted himself on the previous evening. But before he thrust his pyjamas out of the lavender-scented sheets, he remembered, and the memory spurred him to hasten his dressing. His doctor had warned him that his favourite cold tub in the morning was not yet advisable, but when he saw the clear water in the round sponge bath, the least luxurious of all baths, the warmth of the morning

overcame his prudence and he splashed about gaily in the shallow water.

When he had rubbed himself with coarse towels and got into his mufti riding dress, Jack felt fitter than he had felt since he had been wounded. He made his way through the quaint and dark old oak-panelled passages to the coffee-room below stairs with a real eagerness to tackle his breakfast. His physical needs had been nursed and gratified to every possible extent hitherto. But until he had seen that face over the wall, had heard and seen that terror within the wall which had smitten the fair girl's face with pallid fear, he had not experienced the moral stimulant which was necessary to rouse him from a slackness of interest in the life about him and which he now felt urging him to action on behalf of the lovely girl who, to him, seemed to be a princess in bonds to some foul demon.

" Why, Master Jack," said old Peter Young, when the young man made his way through the bar parlour to the coffee-room, " I reckon you're twice the man you were yesterday ! Lord ! I always said that the air of St. Mary's is the best in Daneshire. Now then, Selina," he cried, " see our master's breakfast is ready quick and hot." . . . The old man added in a confidential whisper to Jack, " I think you'll be able to eat a bit this morning. I

ha' sent down to Tom Cracknell to see what fish he had got."

And indeed Jack would have been hard to please if the meal set before him did not tempt his appetite. It was a Daneshire marshland breakfast, than which, to my mind, none is better. There was a four-pound tench poached in a net from a dyke during the previous night, a splendid perch, weighing at least three pounds, concerning the capture of which also it is better not to inquire too closely. There were toasted rashers of home-bred, home-fed, home-killed and home-cured bacon, tricked out with a few ruddy-centred poached eggs taken from the nests that morning, and as a side dish there was a great slab of pig's head, pressed, and dotted with tongue.

A real Daneshire marshland breakfast, and Jack's eyes glistened as he sat down to it more than they had glistened over any meal since his return from France.

He hardly looked at the eggs and bacon or even the pressed pig's head. He could get those as good or better at home. But the golden perch and the seductive tench brought back memories to him of the days of his youth, when he lived for weeks on end on the *Belvedere*, his father's ten-ton river yacht, and cooked the fish for breakfast which had been

caught in the early morning or during the night.

I do not know if my readers know the exquisite flavour and firmness of a fresh-caught perch. It is more delicate, and yet richer than that of a sole. A perch, a tench, or an eel, cooked as soon as they are dead, can challenge any sea fish, even a turbot, or a running salmon, and hold its own. And Jack knew it as he placed half the great perch on his plate, dusted it with pepper, gave it a dash of salt, and fell to.

Every mouthful gave him strength and energy. He ate all the back of the perch and then saw what he could do with the tench. This was skinned and plain fried with a little parsley, and by the time that he was puzzling which was the better, with a tendency to vote in favour of the perch, Jack had made a meal worthy of his boyhood. The coffee was bad, and he wondered if old Peter would remember his custom when he was at Cambridge, and had stayed at the *King's Head* during the Long Vac. He sank back in his chair after he had pulled at the old-fashioned bell and watched the door with some interest. Presently old Peter appeared himself, bearing on a tray a noble tankard holding a quart of the ale he still brewed for his own consumption, though he did not sell it in his bar.

"Peter," said Jack, as he took the tankard from

the old man's hands, "you're a nobleman! A child could play with me now. I'd only kill a ruddy Hun! I wouldn't torture him now!"

"He! He! He!" chuckled old Peter, rubbing his white wrinkled knuckles across the grizzled growth of bristly hair which fringed his chin. "I remembered your fancy, Master Jack. And a good wholesome fancy too! Not like young Clunes Purchase, who's a-drinking gin and bitters this time o' day in the bar."

"Purchase?" asked Jack, after a mighty draught of the noble home-brewed. "Is that the millionaire half-caste lot at Northby? I've heard of them. Father was a merchant in Madras, eh?"

"I don't know anything about that, master," said Peter. "But this young fool always keeps hanging round Smeltby, and the tale is that Miss Mary's his fancy. But I don't believe she would take up along of a foreign-looking chap like him."

Jack's heart leapt painfully. He had only seen the girl to whom he knew old Peter referred as "Miss Mary" the once, but he hated to think of her in association with a man reputed to be Eurasian, millionaire though his father was!

"Are they engaged?" he managed to ask without any display of great interest.

Old Peter chuckled again. "They do say," he

said, " that she won't have anything to say to him. But the Princess is set on it. And, poor thing, she hasn't got any father or mother, and that must be terrible living at Smeltby with all the mad folk and the old Princess . . . but there, my tongue runs away with me. Is there anything else you want, Master Jack ? "

" No," said the young man. He could not bring himself to question the innkeeper further on the subject of this girl, who had appealed to him so strongly. Moreover, he wished to be alone to digest this news about young Purchase, which would be considerably harder to assimilate than either the perch or the tench.

" Thank God," he said to himself at last, " I've sent for young Bob Mallett and the car and Sam Buttle and the *Belvedere*. If she wants to clear, I can help her by land or water. Begad ! " he thought to himself. " But what about the air. I'll telegraph over to Ted Taylor at Herringhaven aeroplane station." Then he shook his head. " It won't be any good," he said. " There'll be no private 'planes allowed till the war is over ! My God ! I half wish I was fit to go out again ! "

He took another deep draught from the tankard and lost some of the depression which had suddenly fallen upon him.

He rose from the table, lit a cigar—a light Partaga—and made for the bar.

"I may as well see what this chap Purchase is like," he thought. "Hang him! The idea of a girl with a face like that being sacrificed to an Eurasian!"

He strolled across the entrance to the stable yard and into the comfortable room which London innkeepers would call the bar parlour, or the saloon bar, or some fancy name of that kind.

The hour was so early that but for one slim dandified male figure the room was empty when Jack entered.

Clunes Purchase bore the sign of his birth visibly upon his face. Not only was his skin as dark as that of a horse chestnut, but his eyes were black, small, glittering and sharp pointed at their outer ends. The nose had a suggestion of the Semitic, but was less pronounced and less suggestive of power than the nose of the mighty race of financiers. His cheeks were blue under the razor, a heavy black moustache covered thick and sensual lips. His forehead was low, his chin and cast of feature Grecian, yet a debased Grecian. The tops of his ears were flat, as though they had each been shaved off with one clean cut. He was attired in the extremity of the riding fashion which had appeared just before

the war. But he wore his clothes like an actor. They fitted his person but not his personality. He was well shaped, lithe and singularly graceful. His height was not more than five feet six, and his build and girth were, if anything, slighter than in proportion to his height. Had one been able to see beneath his top boots, the exiguous calf of the native Indian would have been visible. But, attired as he was, in riding breeches and boots, the only sign of weakness was in the extreme delicacy of his knees.

He stood with his left elbow on the bar counter, leering at old Peter's granddaughter, who served in the bar, and who kept looking to right and left as though she would like to escape.

"Humph!" thought Jack. "So this is the millionaire's son who is to be the husband of the girl I saw over the wall yesterday. I'm hanged if he shall be," said the young Daneshire man to himself in a heat of indignation. "We'll have no Hindu or Moslem blood mixed with——" He pulled himself up. He remembered that Sir Hugo Blunderfield had himself taken a Hindu lady for his second wife. . . . And what was the result? occurred to him almost immediately. That all the issue of that second marriage were idiots or lunatics! By all that was holy, Mary Palmer should not be

the mother of horrible things such as that ghastly inhuman animal which had howled and shown its abominable features over the wall on the previous day. She had appealed to him for help; at least she had seemed to accept his offer of help. He would die before he forsook her in her need.

Oh, thank God, thank God, he had sent for men whom he could trust, Bob Mallett and Sam Buttle, and for a car which could not be caught by any car in Daneshire, and for the hydroplane as well as the *Belvedere,* which could outspeed anything on the Daneshire waters.

Clunes Purchase, the Eurasian, looked darklingly at the wholesome British face of Jack as he entered the room. Then he bent over the bar counter and made some remark to Polly Young, old Peter's granddaughter, which set his waxed moustache a-perking upwards, his thick lips wide, and his vision glinting athwart at the new-comer.

Polly flung a look of intense dislike at Purchase, but welcomed Jack with a smile.

"Did ye find the fish to your likin', Master Jack?" asked the genial, healthy, and pretty girl. "I cooked 'em myself."

"It was delicious," replied Jack. "Why, Polly, how you've come on! I should not have known you. And why did I not see you last night?"

"I was up at Smeltby, Master Jack," said Polly. "They learn me 'broidery and curry-makin', and I do a lot of net fancy work—and I'm fond o' Miss Mary."

At the mention of Mary Palmer's name Purchase again began to glower. But Polly nodded to Jack with a sideways jerk of her head to invite him to observe the manners and customs of the Eurasian. Polly knew that her grandfather would not care if she lost the custom of the dark-complexioned man. The old man liked him no better than did his granddaughter.

Purchase shrugged his shoulders, drew forth a gold cigar case, and lit a fresh cigar from the stump of the one he had been smoking. "Well," he said to Polly, with a leer—that strange Indian leer which is at once repellent and magnetic—"I must be goin', don't you know. My lady love will be anxious about me if I delay longer."

Now this unpleasant youth can have had no knowledge that Jack had seen Mary Palmer or would be irritated by the vulgar reference to her—a reference in a public bar. Yet he must have possessed some instinctive feeling that his mention of his "lady love" would be objectionable to the Daneshire man, for as he made it he shot wicked glances out of his black eyes at the convalescent soldier,

For a moment Jack was inclined to knock the little man down. But he remembered in time that he had no right to defend the name of this girl. Moreover, no name had been mentioned, and as he braced himself and clenched his fists Polly gave him a glance.

"D'ye mean Susie Platt?" she asked, with an appearance of innocent interest. "I hear as she's been wonderin' when she'd see ye again."

Now indeed did the Eurasian eyes flash flames. He extended his right little arm menacingly as he advanced towards the bar.

"You, you——" he began to say.

Jack braced himself; he hoped that he might have the excuse of interfering in the defence of the genial Polly. But Polly had no fear of Purchase. She laughed him in the face. "Well," she added. "They do say as——"

Jack had interposed himself between Purchase and the bar. The dark-complexioned man estimated him with a swift glance.

Then he turned on his heel and strode from the room. Presently he was heard cursing the ostler for delay in bringing out his horse.

"You seem to have got on his nerves a bit," said Jack, laughing.

"Ask grandfather to tell ye about him and

Susie," said Polly. "I don't like to. It is not a nice tale. But if I see that little rascal likely to take Miss Mary to church, my sakes, I'll tell it her myself."

"Polly," said Jack, holding out his hand, "you're a sport!"

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CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

JACK'S difficulty now was to pass the time till the hour of his appointment with Mary Palmer should arrive. He was not yet greatly disturbed by old Peter's story that the Eurasian was favoured by the Princess as a husband for her step-granddaughter; nor by the man's own casual reference to his "lady-love"—a reference which had been so swiftly cut short by Polly Young's reply. But he could not free his mind from the horror which had come over him at the sights and sounds from over the wall on the previous day. That a girl such as Mary should be practically imprisoned with a number of dangerous lunatics was horrible to him.

He determined not to saddle Kitchener till he was wanted for the afternoon. He entered the stables and had a talk with his horse, giving him sugar, and stroking his nose tenderly till the horse whinnied with delight and nuzzled at his master's face with

his great lips. Jack was wondering what on earth he should do to get through the morning hours, when he heard the harsh squeal of the electric siren which he knew to belong to the Rolls-Royce.

"By Jove!" he said. "Bob must have brought her along."

He left the stables and went out into the market-place in front of the *King's Head*. Again the horrible harsh squeal of the siren warned him. And presently the racing-looking car swung round with Bob Mallett at the wheel. When Jack first saw Bob there was a look of ecstatic beatitude upon his face. But as soon as Bob saw his young master he assumed the expression of an injured and indignant man.

Jack knew his man and grinned as the car stopped in front of the hotel. He would almost have guessed the exact words with which the groom and chauffeur would greet him.

"Well, Bob," he said. "Come over without any engine or tyre trouble?"

"Oh," said young Bob grudgingly. "She hasn't jibbed this mornin'. But lord, Master Jack! I feel to want the pull of a hoss at the reins or the feel of him atween my legs. Then there's the smell. Do ye know a smell so sweet as the smell o' hot pig-skin and the sweat of the hoss? Then

there's the smell o' wet sand a-cleanin' the bits or the stirrups! But this here contraption that seems to stink o' bad oil! Poof! And then there's my father always at me, saying I disgrace the family by driving such a thing."

Jack laughed. "Oh, well, Bob," he replied. "I don't say the car is so aromatic as a horse and its gear, but you'll admit she can move. At least I fancy you must have brought her along this morning a good deal faster than you could have come on any horse in the stables, even Kitch."

Bob snorted. "I reckon, Master Jack," he said, "as you've been and overrode him. You ha' got so used to goin' at fifty mile an hour as you hain't got no pity for the good flesh and blood of the rixer now! What's the matter with him? I suppose you ha' sent for me to put him right again!"

Jack fairly burst out laughing and shook his head at the groom who, on his part, was unable to refrain from a grin.

"Kitch is all right, Bob," he said. "But I may want to leave here faster than he can go, and I may want to take some one with me. You'll admit that for purposes of escape for more than one the car is better than the horse."

"She may be for them as likes her," said

Bob grudgingly. "But for enjoyment give me a hoss."

"I'll agree with you there," said the young man. "D'you know if Sam Buttle has started?"

"He came and see me before he went aboard," said Bob. "He's sailin' the *Belvedere* and a towin' that there jumpin' frog contraption. He says if he tries to tow the cutter with the motor-boat he is afraid he'll carry away somethin'."

Jack knew that just as young Bob Mallett pretended to loathe the car, so did Sam Buttle pretend to despise the hydroplane. As a rule this did not matter, but the wind was south-easterly, and if Sam meant to beat up the many reaches of the Saelig in which he would be head to wind, with the hydroplane towing behind, this would not only mean delay, but promised a smash up of the powerful motor craft. However, Sam's words were worse than his deeds, and just as Bob had brought the car at its best pace, with a good deal of enjoyment, so, Jack believed, would Sam lower sail in the *Belvedere* and use the motor-boat to tow the larger craft up to the staith against St. Mary's Bridge.

"Run her in, Bob," he said. "I shan't want the car to-day. You'll find the garage at the end of the yard. And as you're here you may as well look over Kitch. The ostler is all right, but he doesn't under-

stand how to put the finishing touch on a horse as you do."

The young groom's and chauffeur's face lit up with pleasure at the compliment. He would have died for his young master readily, and though, according to the custom of his kind, he liked to "grouse," he was only too pleased to do anything that Jack commanded.

He let in the clutch and steered the car carefully beneath the overhanging first floor of the hotel while he ran her up the coaching yard to the great coach-house which had been converted into a garage.

Jack strolled after him, and when he had seen the car cosily laid up, and observed with a chuckle the extreme care with which Bob examined her engine before he left her, he said, "Any message from the squire?"

"Only as he hopes you're the better for the change," replied Bob. "He didn't know what to make o' your wantin' the car and the craft. And he told me to ask ye to let him know if you wanted him for anything. He gave me this to hand to ye, master."

He took a canvas bag from his pocket and gave it to his young master. Jack opened it and found it stuffed with Treasury notes and a half-sheet of letter-paper on which his father had scribbled, "I

fancy you're up to something, my son. I know I can trust you and money is always useful. Let me know what the game is as soon as you think fit, and remember, my dear boy, that you can rely on your old father to help you in anything."

Jack's eyes grew moist for a moment as he read the squire's note. "Dear old father," he said. "Perhaps I'll run home and see him. It all depends on how things go here. Anyway, I know he would approve of what I mean to do—if I can."

Bob closed the bonnet of the car and came out wiping his mouth with his hand. "That was wonderful dusty drivin' over, Master Jack," he said. "I reckon I could do a half-pint."

"A half-pint" is the Daneshire name for any quantity of beer from a glass to a gallon. The expression really means "as much beer as I can get."

"All right," said Jack, laughing. "You know old Peter Young. Tell him to charge my account with what you have. And, Bob, you'd better see about a bed here. I may want you for a day or two."

"I reckon there's a gal in it," Bob said to himself as he made his way to the bar parlour. "Yet the young master doesn't often worry himself about wenches. I'll ask old Peter. That's a rum un as

he should want the car and the hyderplanner and the yacht as well as the rixer ! Howsomedever, I'll foller Master Jack's lead to the devil himself, and so will Sam when he comes. He ! He ! I wonder if I did right to bring them pistols from the gun-room ! And Sam, he has got two duck guns, eight bores, and the repeatin' rifle. I wonder what the game is ! ''

Jack strolled out into the market-place and turned to the right past the splendid old church, with its huge square tower standing separated from the church itself.

He had slung the prismatic field-glasses which he had used in France round his shoulders, and meant to search for any sign of the *Belvedere*. The great expanse of marshland which now covered what was once a salt-water estuary would permit him to see twenty miles from the top of the church tower. He hesitated. Sam could hardly have got into the Saelig yet. He had to come down the Norwater, pass Herringhaven, run over Broadwater, the great muddy estuary into which the three Daneshire rivers—the Thorwater, the Norwater, and the Saelig—flowed to discharge themselves through Herringhaven Harbour, and he would have the tide against him in the Saelig. No, it was not worth while to look for him yet. But, ah ! Could he get

a view of the Walled-in House, the mysterious seat of the Princess, the wife of Sir Hugo Blunderfield ?

Suddenly he made up his mind and strolled to the little thatched cottage against the churchyard where dwelt the sexton who had charge of the keys of the tower.

" Why ! " said old Billy Bee, the sexton, when he saw the young man at his door. " That's a long time since I saw ye here, sir. The keys ! Here they are. D'ye want me to go wi' ye ? "

" No, thank you," said Jack. " I know my way. I have not forgotten that, though it is so long since I was here."

" And they do say as you're a hero," said old Billy, a remark which sent Jack off swiftly. He loathed any reference to his work in the war.

The steep winding stairway within the tower tried him somewhat. " By Jove," he said to himself. " I've not got my full strength back yet ! It's as well that I sent for reinforcements ! Please God if there's work to do to rescue that sweet girl I shall be equal to it." Then he laughed a little ruefully. " But," he thought, " how can I be sure that she wants any rescuing ? She was upset yesterday because one of those horrible half-castes got out of hand and away from his keeper. I must be an ass to imagine that she is actually kept a

prisoner within the walls! Yet—yet old Peter's story was funny."

He was still wondering whether he was an ass or a chivalrous knight "in silver armour gleaming," like Lohengrin, when he thrust up the trap door which gave him access to the flat roof of the tower. When he had emerged and made his way to the buttresses which fringed the tower like those of the keep of a Norman castle, he looked to the north-east in the direction of Smeltby.

He followed the winding river through his glasses till he found Smeltrun Lock, and from that point he sought the Manor. He started when he discovered that he could see well within the grounds save where the thick foliage of the park trees intervened. The front of the house was visible. It was a low, long white front, with a terrace running past the French windows of the ground floor, covered by a stout veranda, glass roofed, on to which French windows opened from the first floor. Two or three dormer windows suggested that there were attics above the first floor, but there was no real third story.

He swept his glasses to the smooth grass which stretched down from the terrace to a border of rare shrubs, beyond which extended the park. A small herd of Jersey cows and a few dappled deer ranged

beneath the great oaks and beeches amidst the bracken. And then he felt his flesh grow cold with nausea.

An ape-like thing, clad as a man, dark-visaged, resembling in features the horrible face he had seen over the wall on the previous day, was half walking, half crawling on all-fours towards the cows. There was something disgusting in the figure, something horribly repellent. It sidled, it advanced in little jerky leaps. The distance was too great to permit Jack to see the expression on its darkling face, fine as were the Ross lenses of his binoculars. But Jack's imagination enabled him to envisage a cruel animal leer. The cows browsed peacefully; the beautiful slender limbs and satin hides making them appear nearly as dainty as the deer. The crawling monstrosity drew nearer and nearer to one dun and white beauty, and then, with a suddenness which made the observer gasp, the man-shaped thing gave the cow a running kick.

Had Jack possessed a rifle which would have carried the distance he would have shot down that dark-faced thing without scruple. As it was he could only shudder, and curse. Then, while he was forcing himself to realize that within the walls that confined that horror the girl who had leapt into his heart at first sight was, so far as he believed, im-

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prisoned, and while the thought forced out a dew upon his skin which was cold as ice despite the heat of the day, he saw a couple of men rush down from the house towards the abomination. And, at the same moment, a dainty little Jersey bull came charging up towards the dun cow and the madman. The other cows had fled a little distance and were now standing in a crescent-shaped line, looking at their comrade, and at their lord and master charging into the fray. It was a fine sight to see the little bull "go into action," as Jack put it to himself. Before the men running from the Hall could reach the madman whom they had permitted to escape from their control, the gallant little bull had tossed the man-shaped horror eight feet in the air, while the bull stood, with his tail sweeping savagely, his nostrils wide, his eyes flaming, awaiting his enemy's descent.

But for the men from the Hall it would have been a proper end for the half-caste horror. But his body had hardly thumped down on the grass when the two keepers, as Jack presumed them to be, were on him, and the little bull snorting defiance, seemed to be satisfied with his victory. He strode off towards the rest of his herd, nuzzling the dun cow which limped painfully beside him. It was a pretty thing to see the bull try to comfort his mates; a

pretty thing to see the manner in which the dun cow opened her lips and bit gently with them at her lord's cheeks.

But there was nothing pretty about the human actors in the scene. The two keepers flung themselves on the lunatic and held his arms behind him while he writhed and tried to free himself. Then, as Jack saw the two keepers, or attendants, force the dark-faced madman up towards the Hall, two other figures swung into the field of his lenses. One was Clunes Purchase, almost as dark in complexion as the thing which had just been tossed, and the other was, yes, Mary Palmer : and she was shrinking, shuddering as Jack could see even at that distance.

It did not occur to Jack that it was a little indiscreet to watch the privacy of these people. His heart was so wrenched at what he believed was the persecution of the girl who had won it, that all delicacy of conventional manners were as naught. He saw Purchase try to take the girl's hand and saw her snatch it away. He saw the man lay his hand on Mary's arm and saw her wrench herself free and run to the open French windows, while Purchase followed. And then he saw a white-clad, veiled shape sweep with extraordinary dignity and " presence " on to the terrace. It was the shape of a

tall woman, clothed entirely in white, her face hidden by a white veil, her robe like no English dress. It was as though an Indian queen had stepped out upon the terrace.

For an instant Purchase stopped his pursuit, but it seemed that the new-comer, the mysterious white-robed woman, did not resent his action. Indeed, she waved an arm, on which glistened many bracelets, and the man entered the house through the window which had just admitted Mary.

"I can't stand this," muttered Jack. "My gum, I hope she has managed to get clear."

He stamped about the lead-covered roof of the tower as he felt his helplessness. How could he contain himself until the time came for him to look for the face he had come to love over the wall? And how could he gain entrance to the house where the girl seemed to be imprisoned? Did his father know Sir Hugo Blunderfield? But if he did, how could he, Jack, ask for an introduction without looking an ass! Moreover, from what old Peter Young had said, the General was rarely seen at Smeltby, and the Princess, the Indian mother of the horrible semi-human things he had seen, would probably refuse to admit him on an introduction to the General.

His heart began to palpitate. He was not yet

entirely recovered from the great weakness which had followed on his wounds.

"This won't do," he told himself. "If I am to be of any use I must be at my best." He tried with some success to calm himself, to steady his nerves which had been strung beyond endurance by the horrid sight in Smeltby Park which his Ross lenses had shown him.

He forced his mind away from Smeltby and turned his glasses to the north-west, in the hope of seeing something of the *Belvedere* and the *Dragon-fly*.

Far over the great spread of marsh, amidst the browsing stock as it seemed, he thought he recognized a jib-headed topsail and the peak of a mainsail which he knew.

"If that's Sam," he said to himself, "he won't be up at the staith before night. Why doesn't the fool tow the cutter?"

But then common sense came to the rescue. The *Dragon-fly*, the hydroplane, was not built for towing. She could skip along the surface of the inland waters like any "fresher,"[1] but the jerk of the tow-rope as she rose would either smash the tow-rope or injure the swift water-plane.

Jack noted their location carefully through his binoculars and decided that the cutter was near the

[1] A Daneshire marshland name for a young frog.—J. B.

mouth of the dyke leading from Loving Lake to the Saelig. He saw the yacht heel over as the breeze caught her and watched the manner in which she came up on a long leg and a short leg past the Saelig Arms Reach. No one but a master of the Daneshire water-craft and with a master hand on the tiller could have given just that touch of perfect management which sent the cutter about in a rounded curve, making the most of her upriver way, as she filled after being in stays. Indeed, Jack would have been ready to admit that no man in the world could have given the *Belvedere* just that magic touch which made the most of her way as she swung round but Sam Buttle. And in this Jack would have found support in the riverside opinion. For as the helmsman of a racing river yacht on the Daneshire waters from Odinton to Herringhaven, from St. Mary's on the Fen to the first lock on the Norwater, Sam had no equal as a wherryman in the winter months or a racing skipper from May to September. And more than that, Sam was a man and a sportsman. There were other very skilful racing skippers: there was old Jimmie Amis, for example. But the difference between the men lay in the fact that Sam's powers rose as difficulties met him, whereas unless old Jimmie was sailing a winning race he lost his head.

Not even Sam Buttle could steer a racing yacht more skilfully than Jimmie, provided that his craft was winning. But no sooner was his boat held, or passed, than old Jimmie began to call out, "Oh dear, oh dear, what shall we do now! They're a comin' up on us as sure as death! Oh dear! Oh dear! I reckon this wind will beat us!"

Whereas in similar circumstances Sam would press his lips together, his eyes would lighten and flash, his body, splendidly preserved for all his sixty years, would seem to grow tense, and his orders to his hands would bark out sharp and imperious. That was where lay Sam's worth in the eyes of his young master, who watched the way he brought up the *Belvedere* single-handed from the Trawlhaven Dyke to the Saelig River and on up to Seven-mile Car.

"Well," he sighed, with a sort of prayerful thankfulness, "there's one thing certain. I could find no better nor more able helpers than Sam Buttle on the water and young Bob Mallett ashore."

He took a last look through his binoculars at Smeltby Hall and saw that no form of human or semi-human life was to be observed in its grounds as visible from the church tower.

Would his lady of yesterday keep her appointment for the afternoon? Would she be able to

keep it, and if she did, what would be her orders to him ? Whatever they were, he was prepared to obey them to the uttermost.

" I know I'm an ass," he said to himself, as he stumbled down the ladder from the tower in the dark. " But I am gone on her like the dickens ! Never was so gone on a girl ! Anyway it's an infernal shame she should be shut up there with a lot of lunies and an Indian Princess. Poor little thing ! I'll help her if I can."

Over the river, near Smeltby Manor House and Park, the howls of beaten animals made the day hideous so that the honest country workers shuddered as they passed on their way to their dinner and felt justified in going to the expense of an extra " half-pint " in spite of the increase of cost which the Government has seen fit to demand from the poorest paid class in the land for the modest comfort of what is called beer.

CHAPTER V

A CRY FOR HELP

IT was close on the hour of lunch, or as old Peter Young would have called it with an intentional air of decision, dinner, when Jack got back to the *King's Head.* Young Bob Mallett met him at the entrance to the great square yard, and young Bob grinned pleasantly.

"I don't see much wrong with Kitch, Master Jack," said the groom. "O' course they don't know how to groom him same as me and father do. But he don't look so bad considerin'."

This was very high praise from a son of the house of Mallett of the work on a horse belonging to Chittenham Hall, and Jack felt satisfied that his judgment had been correct in relieving him of anxiety as to the treatment of Kitchener in the *King's Head* stables.

"Good, Bob!" said Jack. "What about the car? Is she ready to run for her life and our lives

if necessary, eh what ? I don't suppose she'll be wanted to-day, but one never knows, and I wish you to have her ready and at her best at any moment."

"She's all right, sir," said Bob. "Lord, how father did go on about me bringin' of her without a hoss, in case she stopped a-workin'. You'll never teach the old man any better, Master Jack, and that's no good tryin'. So far as a hoss is concerned, he's a master. But he hate these engine things like the old devil hisself. That's lucky for all of us as he had a son like me, ain't it, sir ? "

Jack burst out laughing at his henchman's bland self-satisfaction. But though he laughed he knew that young Bob was entirely in earnest. That he only meant that it was fortunate for Jack that one of the Mallett family—the family which had provided the coachmen and grooms for the squires of Chittenham for generations and, in their hearts, expected to carry on the tradition of service "*in saecula saeculorum*"—should have proved a competent motor-driver and machinist.

"Well, I think it is, Bob," he said, still chuckling. "And if you'd tell the truth, you know you like the car."

Bob wiped his lips with his hand, hesitated and grinned again somewhat doubtfully. "Well, Master Jack," he said, "she certainly can move, and them

twiddly things are interestin'. I always did like lookin' into the innards of machines, like lawn-mowers and such like, and this here motor certainly beats a lawn-mower."

Again Jack roared with laughter. To compare one of the latest Rolls-Royce models, bought just prior to the outbreak of hostilities, to the old-fashioned lawn-mower which was still drawn over the Chittenham Hall lawns by a donkey older than the mower, was funny to him. But to Bob it was quite natural to compare the two. They were both "engines," or "machines." The tremendous difference between them did not affect him. And, to be frank, he was falling in love with the Rolls-Royce engine which obeyed his touch on pedal or lever so swiftly and so effectively.

Jack knew that in Bob there were the makings of a mechanical genius. He had no wish to diminish the young groom's love of horses, but he did desire to use Bob's mechanical abilities to their utmost. He did not think the Rolls-Royce would be wanted till late in the evening of that day, if at all. And he was anxious that the *Dragon-fly* should be at St. Mary's staithe ready for use if the hidden events of the afternoon indicated that she would be a better means of escape for the girl with the wonderful face than the car.

"Do you know the engine of the *Dragon-fly*, Bob?" asked Jack.

"Do I know it, Master Jack?" cried Bob indignantly. "Didn't I spend three days on it a-lookin' at the difference between that and the car?"

"And can you steer a——"

"Lord, Master Jack, as if I hadn't steered you often and often in the old steam-launch the squire used to think such a deal of? I don't say I'm equal to Sam at it, nor he ain't equal to me on a hoss or on the car, but I could bring the *Dragon-fly* up better than him if so be as I hadn't to tow the *Belvedere*. I don't know anything about towin'."

"Good," said Jack. "Then take the train here as soon as you have had your dinner and go to Aldercar Road. You'll get to the bridge before Sam can with the wind and tide as they are. Tell him you are to bring up the *Dragon-fly* and he is to come on with the cutter. See? That's right. Now, be quick and have your dinner. There is a train at five minutes past one and I want you to catch it."

Bob knuckled his forehead in the old-fashioned groom's salute. He grinned more broadly. He had never had what he called a "fair doing" with the *Dragon-fly* with her engines going, and he knew that

Sam Buttle would be glad, to use his own language, to be " shut of the blarmed thing."

Jack went into the coffee-room to lunch with the pleasant feeling that he had taken all the precautions which were possible in the circumstances. It had not yet occurred to him that he might place himself in an awkward position by assisting the elopement of a general's granddaughter from the lady in whose charge she was. All he remembered was the beauty of Mary's face, the infinite terror in her voice when she cried for help, and the horror not only of the face over the wall which he had seen on the previous day but of the ghastly cruelties which he had witnessed that morning through his binoculars from the top of the square church tower. And then, too, there was that half-caste, that slimy, treacherous swine, as Jack called him to himself, Clunes Purchase. He had seen him try to woo Mary, had seen her break from him and run for security into the house, and then had seen that tall, white-clad and veiled figure, full of the majesty of a great " presence," appear and urge the Eurasian on in his persecution of the girl. For that it was persecution Jack did not doubt at all. He shuddered to think of Mary's fate, shut up inside those high walls, surmounted with barbed wire or broken glass, and ever in danger of injury or insult from semi-human

half-castes or of the almost worse agony of persistent wooing by another half-caste, possibly sane but, in Jack's opinion, certainly loathsome, with the consent of the woman who stood in the position of the poor girl's guardian.

The young officer's wounds ached in sympathy with his heart. But his muscles were tense and his mind and determination vigorous. Nevertheless, he was not normal. His temper was frayed on edge by his anxiety. He tore at the bell, and he was abrupt and brusque with the pretty homely maid who answered the urgent summons. "Lunch as quick as you can," he said. "I thought I told Polly Young this morning that I wanted it sharp at half-past twelve."

"Please sir, you said half-past one," replied the girl, and Jack knew she spoke the truth. Feeling a little ashamed of himself, he subsided sullenly, as young men will in such circumstances. "Well," he said a little more courteously, "do please let it be on the table as quickly as you can."

The girl ran off to Polly. "Our young master is upset," she said. "He's in a rare hurry. He wants his lunch quick as quick. Can we let him have it?"

"There now!" cried Polly, vexed, "and I've a couple of baby rabbits for fryin' on purpose. They

won't take ten minutes. Run you along and lay the cloth. And take him in a tankard of grandfather's particular old ale."

Jack looked up and saw the handmaiden bearing the tankard. He drank deep, and the honest malt and hops did him good. "You'll be as quick as you can," he said, but now gently and apologetically, such is the effect of honest home-brewed.

He had hardly had time to "wash and brush up" when Selina, the handmaid, ran up to say his lunch was served. A couple of baby rabbits fried with home-bred, home-fed, home-killed and home-cured bacon and some early mushrooms sprung from the heavy rains a few days ago, soothed our friend Jack. It is perhaps a little humiliating to realize how much a man's temper depends on the condition of his digestive apparatus. The rabbits and bacon were delicious, the mushrooms a dream. And when Polly, remembering that Master Jack—whom in secret she worshipped at an immense distance—never liked sweets, but loved savouries, followed up the tiny bunnies with a couple of Woodger's (of Lowestoft) ham-cured herring devilled on toast, Jack felt as if a child might play with him. He was also more reasonable. A second tankard of the fine old home-brewed had soothed his ragged nerves. He was able now to realize that until about half-past

four o'clock he could do nothing. It had been quite half-past four when he had first seen that face over the wall, and he had begged for an appointment at the same hour of the day. What then was the use of being so fidgety, hurried, and a nuisance to himself and to every one in his proximity ?

He leant back in his chair and lit one of his best Cortinays. And as the blue aromatic incense drifted from his lips, he tried to work out a plan of campaign.

It must be remembered that he had not yet fully recovered his strength, that the events of the past twenty hours had exhausted his nervous system more than his night's rest had revived it. And the coffee of the *King's Head* was too bad to be taken as an antidote to the heaviness sometimes caused by strong old ale.

At all events, probably the best thing that could happen did happen. Towards the last inch of his cigar Jack's eyes closed, his back fell against his chair, and soon he was as sound asleep as old Peter Young himself, who never failed to take his after-dinner nap.

The result was that he woke up suddenly at a little before three o'clock, vastly refreshed and strengthened by his sleep. He sprang from his chair and at first cursed himself heartily. Then he

saw the time and realized that he had been spared between an hour and two of nervous irritation. He still had plenty of time to be at the wall by the time appointed. He was no fool, and he thanked God for the peace and rest which had been vouchsafed him. For Jack's experiences in the field had brought him near to God. He had never been a denier of the Almighty. But, like most young men of his time, education and age, he had recked little of the Power of the Eternal. The trenches and his wounds had brought his Maker closer to him. It takes the *need* of the Superhuman Guardian to force many of His flock to realize His existence and His never-ceasing sentinelship. Now Jack had learnt to look to God, to pray humbly to Him, and to try to understand that the Son of Man and the Son of God had by His self-sacrifice created a bond between the human and the Divine to which all earnest seekers may always have recourse. But for this new faith in Jack this story might have developed very differently. But Jack believed that his intentions were approved by the Eternal Power and were possibly of Divine origin. The close proximity with Death and the mightiness of the battlefield put the petty doubts and dilettante philosophy of young gentlemen on their proper level.

Never again would Jack, nor thousands of his

kind, sit placidly over his pipe and listen to the futilities of agnostic syllogisms. In times of great stress men rise beyond the limitations of our finite human reason, and strain to the Great Father from Whom all has come.

Jack rose to his feet full of energy and eagerness. He hastened out to the stables, called the ostler and saddled Kitchener with his own hands, while the ostler hissed and brushed down the chestnut's knees and pasterns.

The horse nuzzled at his master in his affectionate way, and Jack kissed him on the nose, and patted his sleek shining neck.

"It's all right, Joe," he said to the ostler. "The ceiling over the gateway is too low for me to ride under. If Bob Mallett gets back before I do, tell him to keep handy in case I want him, and to fill the petrol tanks in both the car and the motor-boat."

Old Joe the ostler, a quaint old boy with his shoulders bowed and his bow legs wide at the knees like those of the post boys of old coaching times, touched his forelock. He too knew the Ranworth family, and he and his father and grandfather had known the squires of Chittenham for generations. It is only in the Eastern counties, in Daneshire, that one still finds this delightful patriarchal mutual

affection between the lords of the land and the toilers thereon. And even in Daneshire the old families are succumbing to the great howitzers of plutocracy, and a carpet-maker lives where a country gentleman's family had seen four hundred years make little change in their woods or their people.

Old Joe proudly took Kitchener's bridle and led him into the market-place in front of the *King's Head* for Jack to mount, while the young man fetched his automatic from the car and slipped it in his hip-pocket, seeing that the magazine was full and in its place.

Old Joe delighted to serve Jack. The Ranworths were better off than most of the old county gentry, and Jack and his father had always been free-handed. But even if they had been as miserly as old Tom Samuel, Joe would have paid the same respect. They were the "real gentry." And no one ridicules the capers and galumphing attitudes of the *nouveaux riches* posing as country gentlefolk more than the villagers of Daneshire.

"Thank you, Joe," said Jack, as he swung himself into the saddle. "You'll remember to tell Bob Mallett."

"I'll mind what *you* say, master," replied old Joe.

"There," said the old ostler to himself as Jack

rode off at an easy walk down past the church tower to the bridge over the Saelig, " I'd rather serve him for naught than that Purchase for a crown an hour. He's real gentry, he is. And what's more," added the old man with a contented chuckle, " I'm more like to get the crown out of him than out of that blackavised vermin ! God go with him, say I ! "

Jack rode quietly down the winding hill to the bridge, gave a look to the north to see if there was any sign yet of the *Dragon-fly*, laughed at himself for the absurdity of imagining that Bob could yet even have intercepted Sam Buttle at Aldercar Road, and then, once over the bridge, hinted to his horse what he wished by a gentle pressure of his knees. The gallant rixer cantered easily on, himself choosing the soft headland of grass between the hard highway and the hedge.

It was a little past four when Jack came to the narrow lane which turned off to the right from the main road to Trawlhaven, and steadied his horse to a walk. The greatest heat of the day was over, and there was that golden serenity about sky, river, marsh and woodland which is one of the most entrancing fascinations of a summer evening in the Daneshire marshlands. As the lane wound uphill the elms and oaks kept nearly all of it in shadow, but the light of the sinking sun over St. Mary's

glowed through the foliage like an amber wine. It was still very hot, and the stinging insects were troublesome. Kitchener's tail was ever at work, and though his master had brought him on easily, the close warmth of the day caused a little creamy foam to show at the edge of the saddle. And to Jack's nostrils came that pungent rich aroma of ammonia, of warm pig-skin, and that scent peculiar to the warm sweat of a horse. To a man who loves horses and delights to ride them there are few scents more tonic.

The lane wound like some meandering river, but soon Jack discerned the corner just past which he had seen the face which was to mean so much to him throughout his life.

Young man like, he stiffened in his saddle, sat more upright, squared his shoulders, and, holding his reins and whip in his left hand, twirled his moustache with the first and second fingers of his right. He leant forward and stroked the withers of his horse, beaded with aromatic perspiration. He almost began to preen himself, when upon his hearing there struck a cry so wild, so piteous, so shrill and so heartrending that he gasped at the sound of it, and touching his horse with his heels urged him on at a gallop.

He reached the point of the wall where he had seen

the face on the previous day. He halted Kitchener, stood up in his stirrups and listened. There was a sound of scuffling as of some struggle taking place in the undergrowth against the wall. It was unbearable. He must risk the danger of being discovered. What might not be happening over that eight-foot wall with its summit guarded as though against an infantry attack! For just a second he smiled grimly as he thought of that other barbed wire, which needed so many tons of projectiles to destroy it.

"Steady, Kitch," he said, guiding the horse close to the wall so that he could rest his hand against it. "Steady." And the good horse understood and kept as still as his heaving lungs would permit.

Jack lifted himself to stand on the saddle, and was able to peer over the wall into a dense mass of timber and shrubbery which ran round the Park. He could see nothing and he felt that he could not remain silent, for he still heard the sound of struggling in the undergrowth.

"I'm here," he cried. "I'm here. Oh—oh, Mary, are you near?"

He had used the girl's Christian name almost unconsciously. He was strung to such a pitch of anxiety that all conventional formalities seemed futile. And then, as he peered over the wall, and

steadied himself by holding on to that portion of it on his side which was not barbed nor armed with broken glass, a shriek pealed up into the sky which set his blood aflame one moment and congealed it the next. "Help!" again came the cry. And the voice was the voice of the girl whom he knew that he loved.

CHAPTER VI

THE YOGI

JACK felt that his position was intolerable. He was so helpless. Had he been able to use his brains coolly, uninfluenced by the new dynamic power which had begun to act upon him, he would have realized that the appeal for help could not have been to him. For he was a good half-hour before the time of his vague appointment. And yet would he? Let those of us who have been young and stirred by a sudden and overwhelming passion, a wholesome, healthy passion, for a sweet damsel, try to recall the heart-throbs, the nervous excitement, and, which is in this instance more to the point, the intuitive comprehension of the needs of the loved one and, if we still retain enough sap in our veins to remember, I doubt if we shall call Jack silly because he felt that that call was to him. He did not argue it out. He did not say to himself that Mary Palmer had guessed that she had won his heart, and that therefore the odds were that he

would be before his time at the semi-appointment. What young man of Jack's age in love would degrade his youthful glory by such senile analysis? He knew in his most recondite storage battery of sentience that the voice had called to him.

Kitchener, good horse, stood like a rock. Jack, standing up on his saddle, leant towards the wall and looked over the top of it. As he stood on the saddle, close against the wall, he could easily see over the eight-foot barrier. But his head did not rise so high as the top menace of the barbed wire. He could not spring over into the park of Smeltby Hall. Besides, it would have been outrageous. He would have been compelled to leave Kitchener to see to himself. That mattered little. The wise horse would have seen to himself and have watched the neighbourhood to learn how he could help his master. Few conceited mortals realize how wise and sympathetic horses and dogs can be if they are treated as rational beings. Kitchener understood almost every word Jack said to him, and was fully alive to the game on foot at the moment when the cry for help rang out on the afternoon air.

And dogs and horses are sportsmen, if they are decently bred; and have a sense of humour. Many and many a time a horse or a dog would be a far better ally than one of the lower animals, the human

species without a sense of humour or the capacity for self-sacrificing affection, which alone raise some equine and canine individuals above the selfish types of the *genus homo*.

Kitchener quivered, not so as to shake his master, but just enough to let Jack know that his horse was in sympathy with him. And Jack understood. He loved his horses and dogs when they deserved to be loved. And he often chuckled and said that the percentage of lovable horses and dogs was considerably higher than the percentage of lovable men. Jack was no fool.

"All right, old son," said Jack, and Kitchener understood. "As close to the wall as you can manage." And again Kitchener understood and scraped his satin chestnut skin against the brick.

Again Jack peered into the Smeltby grounds. But his vision was restricted by the close formation of elms, oaks, beeches and ash which raised their proud and ancient heads within the wall, and round the boles and trunks of which there was a dense growth of hazel and ground ash, or seedling elm, and of bramble and wild raspberry.

He, Jack, could with his sportsman's eyes see the signs of the disturbance of the previous day, the broken undergrowth, and—he who had been in the trenches in France shuddered a little—there was the

brown thick stain upon certain fronds of springing bracken which he could not mistake, and which were so much more horrible to him in the surroundings here at Smeltby Hall than the oceans of blood he had seen shed and to which he had attributed his quota, in the Ypres sector.

The young man's teeth ground against each other. He knew that that half-caste cad, Clunes Purchase, had the entry to the home of the girl he was beginning to regard as a goddess. Ah ! Foolish fellow ! And how uncomfortable for the girl till she could teach him that she was a woman and therefore far superior to a goddess. Kitchener raised a foot daintily.

" Steady, old son," again said Jack. Then, when he was about to risk all, and, as he admitted afterwards, to make a hopeless idiot of himself by leaping from his saddle in an attempt to clear the barbed wire, he saw a white-draped shape flicker—there is no other word which would explain—through the trunks of the timber which ran concentrically with the wall.

Was it the girl whom he now called " Mary " when he thought of her ? Immediately he felt that it was not. Some aura emanated from that white-draped figure which was entirely different from the fascination which mastered him when Mary was

near. Moreover the figure was taller than Mary's, moved in a smooth, sedate style distinct from the girl's eager activity, and—yes! By Jove! It was threading its way through the trunks and undergrowth to the place where Jack was eagerly looking over the wall.

And then, between the trunks of two great oaks, Jack saw a face on which was such peace as he had not believed could appear on a human countenance. It was a dark-complexioned face, very soft and beautiful if a little effeminate for a man, and that it was the face of a man Jack never doubted. The features were classic in their purity of outline. The growth of hair on lip and chin seemed so silky that one suspected at once that no razor had ever touched the face. The height of the shrouded figure was a little over British middle height. Its build could not be distinguished beneath the flowing white robe, but one guessed that it was rather fragile than robust.

The eyes were the dominant influence of the aura radiating from the mystic shape. They were of a golden brown, very large and steady, but Jack had never seen anything which impressed him with such an idea of kindness, of benevolent comprehension, of conscious and inexorable power, as did those steady lambent orbs. His fears for Mary were

dissipated, his entire sentient being thrilled with trust in and devotion to the owner of those eyes.

He gazed at the approaching figure as though spell-bound, as perhaps he was.

The stately shape drew near till it stood immediately beneath Jack's face, straining over the wall-top.

" You are not one of us," said the dark stranger. " You have naught to do with the house of Blunderfield. Believe me, young man, it is unwise of you to press your curiosity where it will be resented."

The voice was mellow and sweet. There was none of the absurd Babu phraseology which has provided so many funny paragraphs to the daily papers and monthly magazines. Jack felt the magnetism of the stranger. He was, to a certain extent, awed and calmed by the power which emanated from the white-robed figure. Yet he was not altogether satisfied. He had never been an intellectual weakling, and his experiences in the tragic scenes of war had invested him with a stubborn strength of purpose and vastly increased his mental vigour. It may be that it was rather a growth of soul, an uplifting of that mysterious element in men which cannot be dissected, analysed or discovered under the microscope, but which is the most potent factor in all sentient beings in that it is immortal, which

helped Jack to remain master of himself while those wonderful eyes still tried to dominate his individuality. He shook his head as though to clear his brain of dizziness, and when again he met the gaze of the stranger the latter appeared less magnetic, less stately and less benevolent.

"I don't know who you are, sir," said Jack bluntly. "Nor do I understand what business you can have with me."

For a moment there was a flash in the grave dark eyes which was full of malice. And Jack caught it, and tautened his sinews as though by so doing he might brace his mental faculties, as perhaps he did.

"You young men of the West," said the dark stranger, "are stiff to bend, are hardened in your obduracy. Listen," cried the stranger. "Listen, and obey."

He raised his right hand high above his turbaned head, and seemed to summon assistance from the zenith.

Jack wrenched his eyes from the winkless glare of those dark orbs which held such dangerous allures within their glowing depths and again braced himself.

"Can't see how that's to the point, sir," he replied blandly. "If you have any business with me, will you signify its nature."

And now the smooth mellow voice assumed a different *timbre*. There were venom and menace in the hissed words which replied to the young officer's imperturbability.

"Dare to interfere with a daughter of the house and know that you will bring the wrath of Shiva upon you. Dare to look upon the grandchild of a princess of Ind and——"

"Oh, come," said Jack. "Shiva doesn't go here. And, if you refer to Miss Palmer, she is not a granddaughter of any princess of Ind. My dear sir, as our American friends would say, this bluff won't go in Christian England. You speak of Shiva." Jack took one hand from the coping of the wall and removed his broad-brimmed Panama reverently. "I call on Christ the Son of Man and the Son of God to help me if that Christian lady is in peril among you heathen."

And, as he spoke, the power waned in the dark eyes, and the stately figure shrank still more. The afternoon breeze sent a sough of coolness and sweet fragrance through the whispering trees. The tension, which had come near to exhaust the convalescent, was relaxed. Silently and stealthily the white shape wound its way of retreat through the trunks and underwood, and Jack was left alone, a little enervated but with a sense of such joy and triumph

in his heart and brain, aye, and soul, as he had never known before.

But he felt that he could no longer endure the strain of standing up in his saddle. He bent and carefully resumed his seat astride his noble horse. But he did not bid " Kitch " move from the spot. He sat a while, resting, marvelling at what he had seen and heard, and humbly thanking the God Whom the war had taught him to know for what he felt instinctively had been an escape from a deadly peril.

Jack looked at his wristlet watch. It was now barely half-past four. She might come still. She might come still.

And, even as he told himself this, the sweet voice of the girl he had learnt to be Mary Palmer murmured softly on the other side of the wall, " Are you there ? Oh ! Are you there ? "

CHAPTER VII

THE SECOND MEETING

AS soon as Jack heard the voice which he knew to be Mary Palmer's, the last suggestion of faintness left him. "Yes," he replied, bidding his horse stand firm by a touch on his withers while he again hoisted himself to his feet on the saddle by clutching at the uneven places of the wall with his hands. "I'm here. I was afraid you would be unable to come."

He lifted his face above the wall and saw the girl standing almost in the same spot as that which the dark stranger had occupied. She was looking up and he caught the light of her eyes full in his own eager gaze.

If her eyes were bright and more trustful than on the previous day, she was paler, and wore an appearance of being more troubled even than before. On the previous day her expression was, when first he saw her, of sheer terror. Now it hinted at something deeper, more lasting than terror can ever be.

"It was not easy," she replied. "And oh! I don't know why I have come. How can you help me? How can you?"

"I don't know," said Jack, fervently. "But somehow I'll find out."

"You don't even know who and what I am," said the girl. "I ought to feel shame at talking to you in this way."

"Why?" pleaded Jack. "Can't you feel that you can trust me? I pledge you my honour that you may. That I will do all I can to help you as honestly as though you were my sister. I'm Jack Ranworth of Chittenham and"—he ignored the girl's little cry of pleasure—"you are Miss Mary Palmer. You see, I have learnt something about you."

At this the girl drew back a little as if she were afraid that he had been making inquiries about her.

Well, he had, but in a way to which she could have taken no objection. He understood her hesitation.

"Oh!" he cried. "Don't think I've been asking about you all over the place. But I am staying at the *King's Head* at St. Mary's-on-the-Fen, and Polly Young told me she comes up to your place to learn something or other, and do some fancy work, and she told me your name."

Mary brightened again at this. " Polly is a good girl," she said. " I know she would help me if she could."

" But if she can't, why don't you try what I can do ? " asked Jack, persuasively.

He longed to ask her if he should kick Clunes Purchase with a good healthy kick. But he realized that to mention the half-caste's name would be indelicate, and he felt sure that Mary would resent it.

" You see, it is so difficult," said Mary.

" We shall score all the more if we bring it off," replied Jack, feeling intensely pleased with himself with what he considered to be the artful manner in which he had associated himself with the girl by the use of the plural pronoun.

At this Mary smiled for the first time. And if her face had fascinated the young officer in stillness and anxiety, it thrilled him a thousand times more in its flashing, dancing light of humour. What a girl this was ! he told himself. He knew his father would approve of any honourable course he took to rescue her from whatever peril menaced her. And of the nature of that peril he had some inkling.

That that half-caste swine, that slimy Eurasian Purchase should dare to persecute such a girl as this with his attentions was simply disgusting, he

thought. If he could do nothing else he'd put a stopper on Mr. Purchase's little game in some way or other. Hanged if he would not !

" You don't know how horrible it is here," said the girl. " No one is ever allowed to go at large about the place but those who never leave it. Polly does not see the worst, anything like the worst. She is always carefully shepherded in and out, and she would not be allowed to come if she could not do certain work which no other woman in the place can do."

" I know more than you think," said Jack, after a moment's hesitation. " I saw that hand and face which came so dreadfully close to you yesterday—and—and I—I was on the top of St. Mary's Church tower this morning with my binoculars and saw another thing like that first horrible outrage to humanity, and what he did till the little bull gave him what for."

" Oh ! " cried Mary, " what was that ? I did not know of that. There are three of them. And—oh, Captain Ranworth, I can't possibly tell you."

" Will you be very angry with me if I know ? " asked Jack, his voice modulated to a winning tenderness.

She looked at him wistfully, but did not answer.

" I'll risk it," he said, with an assumption of

gaiety. "If I catch that half-caste beast where I can——"

"Oh!" cried Mary, raising her hands to her face, and guessing that he had seen through his glasses Purchase's attack and her flight. But her shyness did not last long, and presently she dropped her hands and showed her face, now flushed with the momentary shame she had felt.

"Polly's tongue is getting too long," she said.

"Not a bit of it," cried Jack. "But see! If I can you get away from here, is there anywhere you can go for protection? I mean to your own people. Of course my father, Sir John Ranworth, would be proud to offer you such hospitality as he can. But if you are under age, as I believe you are, there might be legal complications. Is there any relation to whom you could go and who would have sufficient courage to keep you safe?"

"Oh, I know that my grandfather would," cried Mary. "He does not know how things are here at all. He would take me away at once if he knew. But I cannot write to him. I am afraid. Polly would take a letter."

"So would I," replied Jack.

"But," continued Mary, "that means delay, and oh! I cannot bear this long. I cannot. The Princess is the worst of all. She frightens me, and

yet she is always so soft and smooth. But her eyes ! "

" What about that other fellow with a turban and a white dressing-gown over the queerest shaped white bags I ever saw ? He seems a poisonous sort of beast. He half frightened me ! "

" Men like you are not so easily frightened, Captain Ranworth," replied Mary, with a second exhibition of dimpling humour. " I *am* allowed to see the papers, and I remember what you——"

" Oh, please don't," begged Jack. " If you knew how fed up we get with all that heroism tosh, you'd spare me."

At this Mary frankly burst out laughing. Every moment her admiration for this young man, whose name was known throughout Daneshire as a Daneshire hero, grew greater. Indeed, it may be that her heart was already beginning to respond to the call which Jack's heart was sending to it in a sort of cardiac wireless system. If it were not so sinful, I might say in Heartsian waves.

Mary's smile was a short one. She paled almost immediately, and said, " You must have seen the Yogi, Gunga Ram. That makes it worse, a thousand times worse. You don't know what that awful man can do. He goes into trances and then tells the Princess what people are doing thousands of miles off."

"Never mind all that devilry," he said. "If you will let me take you away to your grandfather, I shall be proud to do it, and I swear by all that's holy you may trust me as you would a brother. We shall not be alone. There will always be one of our Chittenham henchmen with us, and you know—or I'm afraid you have not had the chance to learn—that they would never lend themselves to anything which would injure a girl like you. Why, I should lose the love and respect of every one of them if I did not play the game."

"We should be caught," objected Mary, trembling with hope nevertheless.

"I've got the fastest Rolls-Royce in the county for the road and the fastest hydroplane in the South of England for the water," Jack assured her. "They are both handy. I sent for them after I saw you yesterday, and they are both at St. Mary's. I can get the car here at any time, and then we must judge whether it will be better to go all the way to your grandfather by car or to take to the hydroplane for part of the way to put the enemy off the scent."

"Why should you take all this trouble for me?" asked Mary. Then seeing his expression she continued, before he could bring himself to speak: "No, I don't mean that. I know you do it in all kindness and chivalry."

She feared lest he might utter the words which her woman's instinct told her were upon his lips, and though she was beginning to feel that Jack was more to her than she had ever thought a man could be, she was not yet ready to hear him declare his devotion.

Yet the knowledge that he loved her did not incline her to trust him the less, but the more. She gauged the type of man he was and knew that he was incapable of treachery or of wronging a girl for whom he cared.

"If—if I can," she said. "I will send you word by Polly. It will be safer than to meet here again. Hark! There is some one calling me now."

And indeed a rich, mellow, but foreign voice was heard calling, "Mary, Mary. Come or I must send to seek. Mr. Purchase is here."

"Hang Mr. Purchase!" cried Jack, impulsively, and with a blush on his good-humoured face he at once apologized.

But Mary laughed again. It was so sweet to her to be able to laugh. "I reciprocate your sentiment," she said, and turned to go.

"But when?" murmured Jack, leaning his head over the wall so that he almost hoisted himself free of the saddle.

"Oh, go! go!" cried Mary, hastening through

the timber, but looking back. Then, before she disappeared, she whispered, so that he saw rather than heard her word, "Soon."

He lowered himself into the saddle, and telling Kitch to go softly, he walked the jolly horse down the grass edge beside the narrow way.

"Great Scott!" he said to himself. "She never told me where her grandfather hangs out. But never mind. She can tell me that when we've made a start. By Jupiter, what a girl!"

Hardly had Jack rounded the first corner of the lane when an extraordinary shape began to clamber down one of the elms which reared their dainty tresses close to that point of the wall which had seen the interview between the young Captain and Mary Palmer.

The human entity which dropped from bough to bough not unlike an ape was at least six feet six inches in height when it stood erect. But usually it crept along with shoulders bowed over its absurdly narrow chest. The freak was not more than twenty-nine inches round the poor fleshless frame which stood for its chest. His arms were as long in proportion as those of an ourang-outang, and there was no more curve or shape in his calves or thighs, in his forearms or upper arms, than is to be seen in any of the monkey tribe. But if his muscles lacked

size and shapeliness they were certainly compensated by their enormous power. Fred Farman —for that was this curious creature's name—was known as an "innocent," or half-witted person, at Smeltby and St. Mary's. Yet the keepers who watched the preserves before the war would have declared that there was no more skilful poacher in Daneshire than Fred. Fred knew his own business and attended to it, and it may be that it was because he was so tired of being treated as an idiot by the people of Smeltby and St. Mary's that he really became the henchman of Clunes Purchase, who, in his nasty half-caste way, had a fancy for anything in the shape of a monstrosity.

It was when Fred, employed by a Smeltby market gardener to set out onions, had been found to have put the bulb ends in four inches deep, that Clunes Purchase came on the scene. After the onion fiasco no gardener or farmer would employ Fred. And, as I have already suggested, Clunes Purchase liked monstrosities or freaks, and when he heard the bony, lath-like man complaining that he didn't know what he should do, the young half-caste millionaire engaged him as his henchman for general purposes.

It was soon evident that Fred could be very useful if he liked. And, as his chief mental disease

was the dislike of any sort of hard manual labour, Purchase discovered that in the "innocent" he had found an instrument of incalculable value. For Fred could creep under the very eyes of a keeper unseen. It was said that he could take the eggs from under a hen pheasant without disturbing the bird.

As a spy Fred was inimitable, and it was as a spy that Purchase had employed him to watch Mary Palmer. It was not that he had any suspicion that there was anything between Mary and Jack that he detailed his lanky freak to watch the girl's comings and goings, but simply because, in his sweet Eurasian nature, he distrusted all women. And he meant to make Mary his wife for reasons which even the Princess did not know.

Fred had hovered about Mary unseen by her for several days, and had witnessed the two innocent interviews between her and Jack. He had not yet reported his discoveries to his patron because he waited till he could report something weighty. That he would discover something which would set his patron against the girl sooner or later he never doubted. And he had become so devoted to Purchase that he was jealous even of the latter's inclination for Mary. Now he was in doubt, for he was by no means such a fool as he pretended. Until he

encountered Clunes Purchase it had paid him to be considered an "innocent." He ran less risk from the keepers, and obtained privileges from the village general shopkeeper and alehouse keeper which are usually allowed to an "innocent" in Daneshire hamlets. But as soon as he found that Purchase had need of sharp wits he was able to provide those sharp wits well enough, and the stealthy and crafty Eurasian did not underrate the abilities of his henchman. Nay, further, he treated Fred as a man and a brother and did not continually refer to him as "poor fellow, he's not quite all there, you know." This was not from good feeling on the part of the half-caste, but simply because he did not know in what repute Fred had previously been held. From whatever reason his treatment of his man arose it made Fred his bondslave. The man was not wholly sane, or he would not have succumbed to so cheap a method of winning his devotion.

That the devotion was won was to the advantage of Clunes Purchase. And when Fred clambered down from the elm after witnessing the interview between Jack and Mary he chuckled, for he knew he had good matter to report.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSPIRACY

FRED FARMAN'S enormous length seemed to creep over the wall like the body of some enormous reptile, so swift, so silent, and so stealthy were the movements of his ungainly limbs. He had heard the Princess call to her step-granddaughter that Clunes Purchase was waiting for her, so he had not to puzzle his head as to whether he should seek for his patron at old Ben Platt's, the wheelwright and blacksmith of the village and the father of the fair Susie, or at Smeltby Hall. He was maliciously exultant. He felt that the news he carried, the substance of the conversation between Mary Palmer and Jack Ranworth, would be of vital interest to Purchase, and ought to produce a considerable reward, though Purchase was notorious for his parsimony.

He dropped lightly into the narrow roadway, looked about him cautiously, and, satisfied that he was not spied upon, shambled off at an extra-

ordinary speed towards the great iron gates which closed the Hall drive from the main road between Herringhaven and Trawlhaven. In those days, when almost every corner of the district held a military watchguard, it was impossible to be too careful.

In the meantime Mary, sick at heart at the thought of the meeting she could not avoid without friction with her step-grandmother, made her way towards the latter, who was standing with Purchase on the stretch of lawn-like turf which led down from the terrace to the wide flung park.

Mary feared the Princess, and would have hated her but for her own sweetness of disposition and a certain calm majesty which encircled the personality of the lady possessed of royal blood of a principality not far from Nepaul. Though the girl did not hate the Princess, she usually felt a chill at her heart when she was in her presence, a feeling not unlike that which many of us experience at the sight of a king cobra or a rattlesnake poised on its tubular coils, its mouth open, its fangs menacing, its forked tongue flickering, and the wicked allurement of its eyes—those horrible lidless eyes of a snake—the inexorable call of which has fascinated so many victims.

It was a different girl who advanced to the

Brahmin Princess and the half-caste from her who had recently spoken so frankly and unreservedly with Jack Ranworth over the wall.

"Where have you been? Why is it that you love to loiter in the jungle by the wall?" asked the Princess.

There was no coarse rage in the Eastern woman's voice. It was round, soft, smooth, and exquisitely musical. Yet the timbre of it sent a shivering terror through the girl. She had always experienced a tremulous fear when she heard those even melodious accents addressed to her. But she was healthy-minded and courageous enough to struggle against that fear and to fight against it. And that although she knew that it had hitherto always overcome her.

She braced herself now, in the pride of her innocence and her race. She, at least, had no share in the dark blood introduced into her grandfather's issue by this terrible and wonderful woman from the East.

"I did not know," she replied simply, "that I was not at liberty to range as I choose through the Park."

"You have kept Mr. Purchase waiting," said the Princess, while the half-caste laid his hand upon her white veiled arm with, perhaps, a better appre-

ciation of the way in which to manage British maidens. Indeed, the Princess had shown less tact than usual, for her methods as a rule were characteristically stealthy and she loved to make her attacks under the subtle guise of affectionate interest. Her dissimulation and the aid of the Yogi were her strongest forces in controlling both people and events.

Mary raised her pretty brows with a show of surprise. "I did not know he was here," she said. "And in any case, had I known I should have supposed he had come here to see you, not me. You see, you two have so much more in common than there can be between him and me."

She gave a glance of scorn at the half-caste, which, I think, she would not have dared to do but for the warmth at her heart caused by her recent interview with Jack.

The Princess was about to reply angrily when, to her momentary intense indignation, she felt her arm gripped forcibly by the half-caste and heard his voice, which had more of an alien twang in it than her own, hissing in her ear. "Leave it to me," he whispered. "To me and the Yogi. Get the Yogi here as soon as you can."

Unseen, unheard by any member of the three—which may be explained by the tenseness of the

situation between the discordant three by those who are ignorant of the psychic wonders of the Northern Hills of India and of Thibet, but which few of those acquainted with those regions and their people would make any attempt to elucidate—the dignified, white-swathed figure of the Yogi appeared. There was the same atmosphere of calm aloofness, of intense peace felt by Mary which had been observed by Jack Ranworth in the presence of the Eastern mystic. Even on the Princess and on the half-caste the influence was apparent. They were subdued and silent while one might count fifty.

Then the Yogi spoke. "I was wanted here. Speak."

Mary moved as though to leave the place, but the Princess said, in her usual mellifluous voice, "Remain here. You must learn that I can make you obey."

All the girl's valiant spirit leapt up in arms at this order of an alien woman. She turned upon the Indian fiercely, and was about to reply as her anger inclined her. But as her eyes swung round in the direction of the Princess they were caught and held by the calm unwinking gaze of the Yogi.

Unfortunately for Mary a few weeks previously before her dread of the Princess and her surroundings had reached their present pitch, she had suffered from a severe headache and been persuaded to

permit the Indian adept to exercise his hypnotic powers over her. Her headache was cured, but as all who have studied the science of hypnosis will understand, from that time she was liable to be hypnotized by the Yogi whenever he chose and could fix her eyes with his.

Her lips were open to speak the words of her revolt, but when the Yogi held her with his infernal power she remained silent, motionless.

"Go to your room and remain there," said the Princess, with a glance at the Yogi. And without a word the girl turned and made her way to the suite of apartments which she was still permitted to retain for her own personal use.

"And now," said the Princess, "we can talk."

The two pure-blooded Buddhists and the half-caste seated themselves on a garden chair and engaged in a conversation of vital moment. They were still discussing ways and means when a maid came hurrying from the house.

"Please, sir," she said to Purchase, looking at the man with eyes in which fear and dislike were evident, "Fred Farman wants to see you. He says it is important."

For a moment the three heads of the conspirators seated on the garden chair drew close together, while their lips moved to the words they whispered.

Then Purchase nodded. "Ask him to come here," he said.

Fred came shambling out, doffing his deplorable hat and slinking along with an air of exaggerated deference.

Presently the three were informed of the purport of the words which had passed between Jack Ranworth and Mary. A few coins passed from Purchase to Fred. "Wait for me in the kitchen," said the half-caste. "I will let you know when I want you again."

So Fred shambled off, looking with some disgust at the insignificance of the reward which had been given him by his patron for tidings which the poacher had believed to be of great value.

"There is no time to waste, Clunes," said the Princess.

"I can control her," objected the Yogi, who was always reluctant to hurry.

"May it be so," replied the Princess. "But at the same time with a young man like that we must be careful. I have heard that his father is a county magistrate. He may choose to defy the law and to use force to see the girl if she remains here and unmarried."

"Force!" said the Yogi, very softly. "What is force compared with my strength?"

"That's all very well," said Purchase. "But the sooner she is my wife the better I shall be pleased. By all means help me with your powers to make her obey me till we are married. . . . I'll see to that afterwards," he added with a vicious grin. "And I've heard you say yourself that with some persons your power is uncertain."

The Yogi was about to reply scornfully when he remembered how he had been defeated by Jack Ranworth's appeal to the Divine Founder of the Western Religion. He felt certain of himself. Yet his failure to control Jack had shaken him He did not believe that there was any power which could prevail against him. But he was philosophical enough, in spite of his fanaticism, to refrain from being too positive in matters where superhuman possibilities were involved.

Moreover, it was his policy to keep the Princess in a good mood. He knew better than any one else, that if her demoniac rage were stirred—that congenital weakness which had tainted her issue—she was beyond his control. It was as though some evil spirit, more powerful than his personal magnetism or developed power of will, entered into her and shook her very soul, so that she was impervious to any other influence save that which sent the dreadful words from her lips and made her graceful limbs

writhe in terrible contortions, while her lips foamed and her face became that of an image of the dread Kali.

Only once had he seen her in that dreadful condition. It was when he had opposed her will. For years he had been working to obtain her wealth for the monastery of which he was a missionary, with dispensation to cross the seas and to do other things unclean in the sight of the twice born without losing caste. He dared not risk arousing that lurking demon now. Moreover, he now had even less love for Mary, who had always kept him aloof save on that one unhappy occasion when her torment induced her to submit to his hypnotic influence, than before he had been foiled by Jack Ranworth ; that fearless, cool-headed Englishman who had appeared so inopportunely as her champion.

" Be it so," he said. " Make what arrangements as seem best to you. It will be for me to see that she is subservient to your wishes."

He rose from his seat and glided off majestically towards the strip of dense wood which fringed the great park. He said that he used the seclusion of this wood for abstruse meditation and prayer, and he may have told the truth as to that !

" When is the earliest you can be ready ? " asked the Princess.

"Well," replied Purchase, "I must get passes from the military for the motor bike all the way. The house is ready. Then there is the parson."

The Princess smiled. "Why bother him?" she asked. "If once she is compelled to spend a night under your roof she must consent to marry you for the sake of her reputation. If Shri Gunga Ram can control her, you will have no difficulty. But why not take the car?"

"Because my Indian is the fastest thing about here," replied the half-caste, ignorant of the power of Jack's Rolls-Royce. "You see, I must have at least two days to prepare."

"Then shall we arrange for the third day from this?" asked the Princess.

"You know it can't be too soon for me," said Purchase. "It's not only the treasure, but the girl allures me. I want to be her master. She is so infernally scornful to me now." His grin was wicked as he spoke. But it aroused no sense of repentance in the Eastern woman. She hated Mary and longed to see her subjugated and humiliated.

"The third day then," said the Princess. "And in the meantime do not be too pressing. No one must suspect. By the third day she shall be under control unless Shri Gunga has lost his powers."

"Agreed," said Purchase. "And now I'd better lose no time in applying for the passes. I may not be able to come here to-morrow."

"Don't come till the third day," urged the Princess. "I will see that Mary is ready, though she may not realize for what."

The white-robed figure held out a tiny hand, less dark in hue than Purchase's face, and the scoundrel half-caste bent over it and kissed it.

With a start the Princess withdrew her hand. She was not sufficiently occidentalized to accept a kissed hand as a mere act of courtesy. Her blood resented what she regarded as a desecration of her womanhood.

But she made no reproach.

CHAPTER IX

JACK'S PRECAUTIONS

AS Jack rode slowly back to the *King's Head*, St. Mary's on the Fen, his brain was busily developing plans for the escape of this girl who had come to mean so much to him, and for her security during the interval which must pass before he could attempt her rescue.

As already stated, there was a deep and abiding love between him and his father, and he realized that although the old gentleman would pardon him anything that was not dishonourable, he would be hurt if Jack went so far as to engage himself to marry a girl without consulting him. And that he did mean to ask Mary to marry him he was now decided. He must go home to Chittenham for a night, and leave Bob Mallett and Sam Buttle at St. Mary's to be on guard and to telegraph to him if they heard of any serious complication arising during his absence. He would speak to Polly Young and beg her to be at Smeltby as often as she

could and to warn Bob Mallett if she saw anything which appeared to menace Mary.

Bob had taken up his quarters at the *King's Head*, while Sam Buttle slept on the *Belvedere*, so that Bob would be the better recipient of Polly's tidings.

He did not know that fortune had favoured him so kindly that Bob had been smitten by Polly's charms, and that Polly was far from being displeased by the attentions which the young groom and chauffeur was beginning to delight to pay her.

"Fool I am," said Jack. "I ought to have had the prudence to bring my little Webley and Scott automatic with me. She could have kept it by her in case of need. I know what! I'll get Polly to take it to her. It is easy enough to hide."

He referred to the smallest of his automatics, a tiny six-shot pistol, which could be hidden in the palm of a large-handed man. It was true that a strong man would require the whole six pills for a dose unless one of them caught him in a vital spot. But the little weapon would be enough to hold at bay any one who was likely to attempt to injure Mary.

He shifted himself in the saddle and exulted to find that his wounded shoulder was getting stronger. It pained him less every day. The new interest which had come into his life seemed to act as a

remedial agent. He would soon be as hale and fit as ever, and as it was he flattered himself he was equal to tackling the half-caste or even either of the hefty keepers who were kept at the Hall to guard the lunatics.

As soon as he had instructed young Bob and Sam Buttle, and persuaded Polly to undertake the delivery of the little automatic to Mary, he snatched a mouthful of food, drank a pint of old Peter's extra special home-brewed, and started for Chittenham in the Rolls-Royce. As the railway lines ran the car would do the journey in less than half the time in which he could get to Chittenham by train.

His military papers and his name would be enough to enable him to pass all the pickets without being delayed, and he was a personal friend of the C.O. of the district.

Well before sunset he was spinning swiftly and silently up the drive through the park lands surrounding his home.

As he drew near to the house he honked the particular sequence of longs and shorts which he knew would inform his father that it was he himself who was driving the car.

The result was that as he let out the clutch and ran up to the hall entrance in perfect style, his father came out to meet him. The old gentleman

was suffering from one of his periodical attacks of gout. But the worst of it was over and he hobbled out leaning on a stick without being compelled to grimace with pain or to use words other than those which are strictly parliamentary.

"My dear boy," said the old man, whom Jack resembled to a tittle save for such differences as years and gout make in a man, "didn't hope to see you back so soon. You're looking better. Nothing wrong, I hope!"

Old Bob Mallett, looking sour and contemptuous, had come round at the sound of the horn, and, with resentment written on every line of his wrinkled and humorous face, he pretended that it was with difficulty that he started the car again and took her round to the garage. But although he meant to look sour, he was unable to prevent his features and eyes from brightening at the sight of his young master. Jack was beloved by all the servants of Chittenham, and by all the village dependants. An excellent reference for the young man's character.

"I hope you won't think there is anything wrong father," said Jack, as he took the old man's arm and helped him back into the great oak-panelled room that served the two for library, smoking and billiard room, and eased him gently into his favourite armchair.

"Thank you, my boy," said the father. "But you want more looking after than I do, though you do seem to have picked up. What'll you have before dinner? You must want something after your spin!"

Jack ordered a drink, and when the old butler had retired the father and son lit cigars, and for a moment they regarded each other in affectionate silence.

Jack flushed as he saw a smile he knew well twinkling in the old gentleman's eyes. "Well, my boy, what is it?" said Sir John. "Got the money all right, didn't you? D'ye want any more?"

Sir John was one of the fortunate Daneshire squires of ancient race and was possessed of very large funds in gilt-edged securities as well as of some four thousand acres of arable, wood and marsh land, all of which had become greatly enhanced in capital value and annual proceeds by the prosperity of the farmers caused by the war. He had no need to stint himself or his son, and he gave an admirable example to fathers in trusting Jack because he had never known the young fellow deceive him.

"D'you know General Blunderfield?" asked Jack, his colour still higher than its normal tint. "Or his son-in-law Colonel Palmer?"

"I used to know 'em both," replied Sir John,

"But poor Palmer died years ago and I have not seen the General for four or five years. I served with him before I married your dear mother. But why?"

"It's this, sir," said Jack, becoming a little more reverential in his manner. "There is a girl——"

"Of course there is, of course there is," chuckled Sir John. "I thought that was what was up. Well, my boy, who is she, and how far has it gone?"

"She is a Miss Mary Palmer, the only daughter of Colonel Palmer——"

"The only child, I fancy," corrected the father.

"Yes, the only child." And then Jack went on to tell his father all that he knew of Mary and her circumstances, and owned that although he had seen so little of her she had made so deep an impression upon him that he had determined to marry her if she could be rescued and was willing to take him for her husband.

"Well, my son," said Sir John. "You don't seem to waste time! But lord! You are just like I was at your age. And I believe you are right in believing that you'll always love her. I never really cared for any other woman but your mother, though mind you I don't say I haven't had some fun with other girls, harmless enough you know. It is in our blood to be clean livers, thank God."

The old gentleman drew hard at his Cabana and was silent, looking into the blue smoke wreaths with eyes that had suddenly become weary. He was thinking of his wife, of whom he had been passionately fond till the day of her death, and whose memory was still ever with him.

"You—you don't forbid me, sir?" asked Jack.

"I don't see why I should, my son," said the old gentleman. "She comes of good stock and you are not a giddy young ass likely to be taken in by a designing wench. From what you say I don't suppose there is any money. But surely you'll have enough for two. And that shan't stand in the way with me. But I admit I should like to have seen her before you actually proposed to her."

"I hope you will," cried Jack joyfully. And then and there he proceeded to unfold to his father the scheme he had devised whereby his darling might be "preserved from the power of the dog," the scheme in fact which was subsequently carried out in every detail so far as the changing circumstances of events permitted.

CHAPTER X

JACK GETS A POINTER

JACK did not start on his return journey to St. Mary's on the Fen till after lunch on the following day. His father had not actually asked him to remain, but the young fellow saw that the old gentleman took much pleasure in his society and would be hurt if he hurried away the first thing in the morning. And Jack was a decent fellow and a good son and would do much to save his father pain. Sir John would not, he knew, say a word of his wishes lest he should seem too exigent to him. And the knowledge that this was so seemed to make it more of a duty to the son to avoid hurting his father's feelings.

Moreover, it would be well to wait till there was time for a telegram to be delivered from St. Mary's. Developments might have arisen which would render a consultation with the old gentleman advisable, and Jack was one of those rare sons who do not scorn their fathers' advice.

By three o'clock there seemed to be no likelihood of the receipt of any telegram from St. Mary's, and Jack set off, with Sir John's best wishes for his adventure and his success in love.

It would not take him much out of the way to go round to St. Mary's by Herringhaven. There he might see Colonel Bridgewater, his father's old friend, and get any passes or other papers from him which he, the C.O., thought would facilitate the execution of the plan which Jack had disclosed to his father. He had an intimate pal in the flying corps stationed at the Herringhaven Aerodrome, and he would take the opportunity of looking Bertie Partridge up. In the Great Adventure it might be useful to be able to call on the help of a flying man; for from an aeroplane the country could be scanned from a far greater distance than from any eminence on land. The captain laughed at himself for what he considered to be his exaggerated preparations, as he slowed down to pay the toll at the Herringhaven end of the New Road across the Marshes, first called the New Road some thirty years previously. He swung through the old town to the front and drove the Rolls-Royce to the District Headquarters, which were situated at the Barracks, close to the aerodrome. It was the first time he had seen Herringhaven since he had been invalided home, indeed since the out-

break of hostilities ; and he slowed down along the front to appreciate the changes which had come over the popular seaside resort.

Out in the roads four or five seaplanes were rising or floating like so many mighty seafowl. On the denes and the splendid expanse of sands, where so many thousands had been wont to sport in holiday time in pre-war days, scarce a civilian was to be seen. All the boarding-houses along the front were empty save such as had been commandeered by the naval or military authorities. The promenade was full of marching men. Defence works were everywhere, and here and there was seen the shattered walls of a house destroyed in one of the dastardly bombardments of the Hun naval and Zeppelin raids.

He had already been halted and asked for his papers six times on the road, but now that he was within the holy of holies he was permitted to run slowly on unimpeded. The pickets knew that any one who had got so far must be supplied with good and sufficient authority for his journey.

He was not long with the C.O., but found him willing to do all in his power to help the son of his old friend. The Colonel was very busy and Jack soon left him to make his way to his friend Bertie Partridge, whose whereabouts he had learnt from the C.O.

"Hullo, old thing," said Bertie, who was afflicted with the fatuity of topical slang. "What's biting you now? Lord, we ought to parade our 'buses to do you honour!"

"Don't be an ass," replied Jack, who hated all reference to the honours he had gained in action. "But see here. I've got the C.O.'s consent that you may go up if I wire to you at any time. I'll wire you what you are to look for, and the direction. I shall be at St. Mary's. If you spot it, come down as near as you can and either look me up at the *King's Head* or wire me there, whichever will save time." He proceeded to tell him as much as he thought necessary. Instinctively he feared that an attempt might be made to remove Mary to some place where she would be out of reach of his help. He had not the remotest idea that he would want the services of his flying friend. But he might. And when Mary was in question that was enough for him. He left the flying man a little bewildered but pledged to do as he had been instructed, subject to permission from the C.O.

Feeling more satisfied with the result of his visit to Herringhaven than he had any reasonable cause to be, Jack was about to start when Partridge said, "What did you say the half-caste's name was? Purchase? Well, I believe he's got a pal or some

one he has under his plutocratic thumb in command of the pickets at Duckingham. Take this as a hint. You can't inquire further. I may be wrong. But remember the tip if it seems likely to be important at any time. So long, old thing."

Jack let in the clutch, got her on to her second and then her third and spun easily through the narrow streets of Herringhaven till he came to the main road which would lead him through Duckingham on his way to St. Mary's. Partridge's words were impressed upon his mind though he had taken little notice of them at the time of their speaking.

He ran through Mereby down the hill to Duckingham station and over the level railway crossing within fifteen minutes from his leaving the aerodrome. A hundred yards further on was the bridge over the Saelig—the river which divides North and South Daneshire—where was stationed the picket in command of which he had been told that Purchase had a friend or a dependant. He eased up at the rise of the bridge, for he knew that he would have to show his papers to the picket who was stationed on the further side. He brought the car to a standstill at the summons of the sentry, who, with fixed bayonet and rifle charged with the service clip of ball cartridges, stood in the middle of the road.

It was here that Jack realized that already

Purchase was working against him. He was not aware that his name was known to the Princess. He did not doubt, indeed he knew instinctively, that his interviews with Mary were known to her enemies. And he had forgotten that it was the simplest thing in the world for Purchase to have inquiries made at the *King's Head*, either by Fred Farman or some other obedient helot, as to his name.

The picket inspected his papers, and at once his manner became suspicious. "You'll have to wait to see the orficer," he said. "He's now comin' back from the *Queen's Head*. There he comes!"

A two-star lieutenant, short, ridiculously pompous, but with a look of hungry anxiety on his insignificant features, was strolling along "the dam" towards the bridge. He hastened his steps as he saw what appeared to be an altercation between his picket and the driver of a car which was obviously an expensive automobile.

"What's the matter?" he said, as he came bustling up. He took Jack's papers, a *laissez passer* signed by a man stationed at St. Mary's which Jack had purposely produced in the first instance, and a driving licence. Jack was in mufti, disliking to parade in khaki when he was out of action so to speak. When he saw the name he frowned. "Ah!" he said. "I've been warned of you. You must

come with me to my quarters at the *Old Bell.*"

Jack smiled upon him blandly. "Perhaps," said he, "you would like to see this?"

He had drawn his man as he intended. He knew now that Purchase had indeed taken such steps as were possible to him to hinder his free passage through the marshlands. He handed the officer the general *permis* which he had just obtained from the C.O. at Herringhaven which gave him permission to motor at his will throughout the district of which he, the Colonel, was in command.

"Hum!" replied the officer, who had not been told that the man he was to look for was a distinguished captain who had gained many laurels in the campaign in France and who had been invalided home. "Hum! How do I know this is not a forgery? I don't know Colonel Bridgewater's hand."

"Jump into my car," said Jack, chuckling, "and I'll drive you over to him. It won't take us fifteen minutes."

The lieutenant hesitated. He had no real doubt that Jack was genuine enough. He recognized the military accent, the *timbre* of the officer's voice. But he was bound very tightly to Purchase by his indebtedness to him, and he knew that the half-caste was not a man to accept apologies. He had held

his commission for more than a year, a commission which he had obtained through the enormous influence which Purchase's financial standing gave the half-caste, and, though he had never left his native shores, he knew the voice and the manners of men who had come back from the front.

He felt that he was between the devil and the deep sea. The tale which Purchase had told him fully justified him in detaining Jack. But he also knew that if it were necessary for his purposes Purchase would not confine himself to the truth. Should he find, as he had no doubt he would, that the general *permis* signed by Colonel Bridgewater was in order, he might seriously injure his future prospects in the army. He stammered a little.

"If you are Captain Ranworth," he said, "have you any documents to prove the fact?"

Jack pointed to his driving licence.

"But you could have got that from him," was the silly remark of the lieutenant. "Have you no others?"

It happened that Jack had several personal letters upon him which would have proved his case, but he saw no reason why he should produce these to satisfy the doubts which the lieutenant pretended to entertain. "See here," he said, "I'm your superior officer. I'm not in uniform, so you are not

bound to salute me. But unless you do I'll motor back to the Colonel and tell him what has happened —and what I've heard about you and Purchase."

This was rather a long shot, for he had heard nothing concerning the relations between this unhappy lieutenant and Purchase which was really derogatory to the latter. But he did not want to be delayed now. The mere fact that Purchase had given instructions to this man, as was evident from his conduct and manner, was enough to set him on tenterhooks. It was clear that the half-caste was already setting his machinations to work to foil any notion Jack had of helping Mary Palmer. Jack suspected now what was the fact, that his last conversation with the girl had been overheard and reported to the half-caste. If things had got so far as this, mischievous complications might develop at any moment, and the sooner he was on the spot, or at least as near the spot as the *King's Head* at St. Mary's was, the better. His heart grew thick with anxiety. Could it be that already some move had been made against him and her? some move which had been made since that morning? He was afire to get to St. Mary's to ask his allies for the latest news.

His long shot brought down the bird. The lieutenant crumpled up. "Pass," he said, and, after

a moment's hesitation, he saluted. "Sorry to have caused you delay."

"Oh, that's all right," said Jack, with a twinkle in his eyes. "You can't be too careful in these days when enemy spies are all over the place. But if I were you I should not report this little incident to Mr. Clunes Purchase."

He let in his clutch, and in a few moments was on the third, speeding at a terrific pace along the winding length of the two-mile dam across from Duckingham to Haddiscoe, commonly known as Haddiscoe Dam.

It was not yet six when he drew up at the *King's Head,* St. Mary's, pleased with the knowledge that he had been put on his guard by the lieutenant on the bridge, and anxious because he feared lest something might have happened to render his rescue of the girl more difficult.

It was as well that he was warned what forces he had against him. And his gallant heart thrilled to the thought that there would be hazard and excitement beyond what he had expected in the great adventure. But he would not make for Chittenham with Mary by river, that would necces-sitate his passing under Duckingham Bridge. He chuckled as he thought of another plan which only needed a telegram to Sir John to be feasible.

CHAPTER XI

POLLY AND BOB

"WHERE is Bob?" asked Jack, as he ran the car under the flooring of part of the first storey of the hotel which formed the top of the arch leading into the old coachyard.

The ostler had come out at the sound of the honking horn, and he grinned as he welcomed Jack. "He's gone out Smeltby way with Miss Polly, Master Jack—beg pardon, Captain I should say. He is getting wonderful partial to seein' Polly don't come to no harm when she's about in all the dangers of our country lanes, Captain. Wonderful partial he is gettin'."

Jack nodded, backed his car into the garage and entered the bar parlour, which was the club of the professional people and more prominent tradespeople of the little town. It was not yet time for the local magnates to enter the hotel for their evening gossip, and Jack found no one there but old Peter, who was

sitting behind the bar in his special easy chair perusing the morning paper.

"I'm right glad you're back, Master Jack," said old Peter, who never bothered whether Jack was lieutenant, captain, major or colonel. Master Jack was good enough for him. "That there man of yours will be a-runnin' off with my Polly if we don't look out! Hech! Hech! Hech! They are always about together and that's a fact. I never saw her take on with another chap as she do with him. When she ain't out with him she've got her head close against his a-whisperin' something as I mustn't know of. O' course grandfaa'er mustn't know. Hech! Hech! Hech! D'ye reckon he's the right sort, Master Jack?"

Jack assured the old man on this point. It would of course be a mésalliance for the granddaughter of the proprietor of the far-famed *King's Head*, St. Mary's on the Fen, to marry a groom and chauffeur. But, on the other hand, old Peter knew what the employees of the Ranworth family were, and he felt sure that should the marriage eventuate, as seemed likely, the squire, Sir John, and Master Jack would see that Bob was put into a position which would not render the discrepancy in the respective positions of the two young people so glaring. Old Peter was a man of means. But he

was also a very human and kind-hearted man, indeed it would not be far out of the way to say "gentleman"; and provided he liked the object of his granddaughter's affections, and was certain that he had nothing against him as to his character he was ready to plank down enough to start the young couple, though, as he told Jack, he would sorely miss Polly out of the bar. "The fact is, master," said the old fellow, "she's too well-lookin', and I shall be glad to see her out on it. That there Purchase chap he's always tryin' to gammon her—and he fare half a nigger for all his brass and bumptiousness. But she know too much for him and she know Susie Platt and all. I reckon she and Bob ha' gone off to Susie's and to have a look round Smeltby. He borrowed the butcher's little car, and lor! they ha' gone off like a gentleman and his lady! Hech! Hech! Hech!"

"Bob left no message for me, or Polly, did they?" asked Jack, letting grammar go where it often should. "Do you know when they'll be back?"

"Polly said if you were to come while she was out, you wasn't to worry," said old Peter. "I called her an imperent young trollop to leave such a message for you, Master Jack. But she only grinned like a Cheshire cat and went off with your man Bob as bold as brass."

Well, that was all right so far as it went. But Jack longed to hear what either Polly or Bob had to tell him. Sam Buttle was down on the yachts, looking at the engines of the *Dragon-fly*, said old Peter. And Jack remembered that he had warned the sailing skipper to have everything ready on both the hydroplane and the cutter for making their best speed at a moment's notice.

He arranged to have dinner served at half-past seven. "And I hope Polly'll be home in time enow to look after it," said old Peter, "for the cook can't do for the likes of you while Polly fares to fare to know what you're partial to." And then Jack went into the private room which was reserved for him unless any officers from the local camps put in an appearance.

The private room looked rather dismal after the cosy spaces of Chittenham Hall, and Jack retired to his bedroom to have a wash and brush up and a change. While he was putting his loose, easy coat on after performing his ablutions he heard the noisy engines of a little two-cylinder car coughing their approach, and guessed that Bob and Polly had returned. He made his way downstairs along the dark, gloomy passages of the old inn, and re-entered the bar parlour just as Polly came in, flushed with her drive, and possibly with sundry innocent

amorous attentions which the gallant Bob had paid her.

She nodded at Jack, and said to her grandfathers "I'll look after the bar for a bit. Things won't be busy for two hours yet. You go along and smoke your pipe in your room, grandfaa'er."

Old Peter chuckled his genial throaty chuckle, and appealed to Jack. "Now, Master Jack," he said, "d'ye call that the right way for a gal to speak to her granddad? Lor, if Bob take——"

Polly blushed furiously. "There! You go along!" she cried. The old man hobbled out and the girl turned to Jack. "I hope he hasn't been filling you with a parcel of nonsense, Captain," she said.

Jack smiled. "I don't think it is nonsense, Polly," he replied. "Bob is a thorough good chap, and both my father and I will be pleased to give him a start in life if he decides to leave service."

Polly's colour was higher still when she said, with a nod at the door through which old Peter had made his exit, "Why, Master Jack—I mean Captain Ranworth—you're as bad as him. I don't hold with such nonsense."

"Stick to the Master Jack, Polly," said Jack, laughing. "But I'm sorry to hear you don't hold

with love affairs, because you know I want you to help me."

It may seem strange that a man of Jack's position should take a girl of Polly's station into his confidence. But he had known her for many years, and after all, since she was no fool, she must be aware that he would not take so much trouble about a girl as he was taking about Mary Palmer unless there were something more than mere friendship or liking in his heart for her. Moreover, he knew Polly" discretion and acuteness, and that he could not have found a better ally than she. It was the act of Providence, or to speak more reverently perhaps, of God, in Whom he had the firmest belief and trust, that had placed Polly in a position in which she could secure access to Mary.

Polly's expression softened, and she was no longer the chaffing girl of the bar parlour. "That's good of you to speak to me like that, sir," she said, calling him "sir" for the first time out of sheer respect for his treatment of her. "I gave the pistol to Miss Mary, and she wished me to thank you for it. She was something glad to get it too, my word! I saw her again to-day, and up to the present she is all right. But they watch her. She can't get out into the Park alone no more. And she says she feels as there is somethin' brewin'. But she don't know

what yet. They don't interfere with my comin' and goin' yet. But I could see as they was keepin' an eye on Miss Mary, poor dear. There now, if I haven't forgot the things I brought. Wait you a minute."

She ran out into the yard and, after a little time, she came running back again, her cheeks flushed and her eyes dancing. She bore two lady's hats, and two lady's coats or cloaks on her arm, and round her neck were two motoring scarves. "There!" she cried. "These I got from Miss Mary. Bob—I mean Mister Mallett"—and she blushed again—"will tell you how we—I mean he—thinks they may come in useful."

There was a sound of footsteps in the yard outside, as though the pedestrian were approaching the entrance to the bar parlour from the yard. Polly snatched up the articles of raiment and disappeared through a private door at the back of the bar, leaving that hospitable counter unguarded. "That would never do for him to see these," was her cryptical remark as she sped through the door.

"Well!" said Jack to himself. "I've got energetic allies, but what the deuce she means I'm hanged if I can make out!"

He strolled out into the yard and awaited the return of Bob, whom he rightly conjectured to be

occupied in returning the two-cylinder rattletrap to the butcher who had lent it. As he passed out into the archway he encountered Clunes Purchase, who was making his way in the direction of the bar parlour. The two men glared at each other as young men in their positions will, and passed without a sign of recognition. But Jack had seen enough to assure him that his suspicions aroused by the lieutenant on Duckingham Bridge were justified, even if the officer's manner when the name of Purchase had been mentioned had not been sufficient.

As he turned his steps towards the market-place he saw a square white object on the bricks of the carriage-way. He stooped and picked it up and found it superscribed with his own name. At once he guessed, and again rightly, that this note must have been with the hats and cloaks which Polly had forgotten momentarily and that when the garments, etc., had been thrown out from the car the note was with them. Perhaps Polly did not know of it, perhaps in her excitement she had forgotten it when she gathered up the things. Anyhow, it was fortunate that Purchase had not noticed it as he passed. Jack had no doubt from whence the note came, and before he opened the envelope he kissed the superscription.

The contents hardly merited so much show of affection, still they were not discouraging.

"Dear Captain Ranworth,—Thank you so much for the pistol. I hope you will not think me forward in writing to thank you. But you know how much I want a friend. I feel sure that something is being plotted against me, and I have a terror of Shri Gunga Ram, the Indian Yogi whom you saw. I am not supposed to know it, but I do know that a strict watch is being kept over me and there is no chance of my being able to get to the wall again. Emma, a maid here, tells me that Fred Farman, a local man supposed to be half-witted but who is really very shrewd and cunning, overheard our conversation the other day and reported it to the Princess and—never mind who else. I did not like to tell Polly this, but I think you ought to know. You may trust Polly entirely, and Susie Platt, too. Polly will tell you why I have given her two hats and coats of mine. It seems that your man is as shrewd as Fred Farman, and if it is necessary I believe his idea which Polly suggested to me may be useful. Oh, how I long to get away from this place! If only I could get to my grandfather! I could of course get a letter to him now by Polly, but I am not sure where he is, and if the letter were returned I

should not see it and it would make things worse for me here. Be on your guard against Gunga Ram and against Fred Farman and his master. I won't write his name, I hate it so. Please do not think me forward for writing to you like this. But I have so wanted a friend on whom I could rely, and I cannot help believing that God has sent you to me in answer to my prayers."

There was no signature, but Jack kissed the letter a dozen times. What was this scheme of Bob Mallett's which needed the use of hats, coats, and motor veils? How long the fellow was! Why on earth did he not hurry up?

At last he heard Bob's brisk footsteps crossing the market-place, and he advanced to meet his man.

CHAPTER XII

THE KIDNAPPING

FOR the next two days there was little to cause alarm to Mary or Jack. At the Hall the Princess seemed to be more kindly to the girl, and Clunes Purchase did not put in an appearance there, so far as Mary knew. Jack purposely avoided going near Smeltby. But every day Bob made his way, up the narrow winding roadway past the wall, in the butcher's car, which the Captain had arranged to hire whenever Bob required it. Polly accompanied Bob, and on one morning he drove her up to the Hall gates so that she might endeavour again to see Mary. This was on the second morning, and when she returned to the *King's Head* and told Jack that for the first time in her life she had been refused entrance poor Jack was overwhelmed with anxiety. For a few moments he had the mad idea of scaling the wall or breaking into the house with Bob and Sam Buttle to back him. But Polly, to whom he mentioned his notion, dissuaded him and told him

that she had arranged a window-blind code with Mary by which she might know if the latter felt that her danger was increasing, and that the signal which was to signify that Jack's lady love was in imminent peril had not been made. Neither Jack nor Polly paused to consider the absurdity of the notion that a girl of good family, in a well-populated district, could be in imminent peril. Indeed, even had they paused, they would have denied the absurdity. That there was something ominous and deadly about the Hall they both felt, and that, with Mary's forebodings, was enough. But until the signal was made they had only the fact that Polly had been denied access to Mary to justify their fears.

On the morning of " the third day " Jack awoke with a presentiment that there was something wrong. He could not define what it was. But he felt that Mary was in peril. It was so early that even the early-rising country folk had not yet sent the echo of their hobnailed boots resounding through the market-place. Jack knew it was useless as yet to rise and seek Polly and beg her to make her way to Smeltby Hall. But it was impossible for him again to compose himself to sleep. It was past first dawn, but the sun was not yet risen, and the light was grey instead of yellow or pink over to the east. Jack

rose and looked out upon the market-place. The old square, with the great square church tower at the south-eastern corner of it, gave that impression of sleep which empty streets and squares will do at such an hour. The very rooks, and the jackdaws in the church tower, had not yet commenced their clamour. How insufferable it was to have to wait with this feeling of oppression at his heart! Why on earth did not people get about earlier? thought Jack, who, since he had been invalided home, was in the habit of rising about half-past nine in the morning—that is to say, since he had been sufficiently convalescent to get about in more or less his accustomed manner.

The dull regularity of the church clock sounding the quarters and the hour irritated him. His nerves were going all astray, when he heard the sound of movement in the inn, and realized that he had been worrying for nearly two hours.

He could not remain in his bedroom longer; so he rose and dressed himself and went down. The interior of the inn was impossible. The reek of last night's tobacco, the smell of last night's drinks, the dust caused by the sweeping chambermaids, the general unreadiness of the place which all who have ever gone downstairs at a country hotel or inn before it has had its daily clean up will recognize,

struck his throat with a sense of nausea. He went out into the yard, and to his great delight he found Bob grooming Kitchener steadily, hissing and singing as he worked at the horse's coat till it shone like satin.

"Why lor, Master Jack," cried Bob, "you fare an early bird this mornin'?" Then, as he saw the drawn expression on his young master's face, he added, "What's wrong, sir?"

"Is Polly down yet?" asked Jack.

Bob blushed to the roots of his hair. "I'm sure I can't tell ye, Master Jack," he said. "But if she ain't I reckon she won't be long because she's told me she has to get up early to see the wenches do their work. If she didn't they'd only give the floorin' a lick and a promise, she says. What's wrong, sir?"

"God knows," said Jack. "But I feel as if some one ought to be watching at Smeltby."

"Then that's me," said Bob. "Why, I can get there in half the time as Polly could. May I have the car, master? They might reckernize old Kitch. But I reckon they don't know the car, and anyways I could leave her hid in a field 'fore I drawed nigh the Hall."

Jack gave a sigh of relief. "Good man, Bob," he said. "By all means take the car, and for God's

sake come back quick if you find anything wrong. You know what I mean."

"That I do, master," said Bob, with a sympathetic grin. He wasted no time in further talk, but hurried into the garage, whence presently came the sound of the sweet-running engine as Bob warmed her up with the accelerator for a few minutes.

Jack would have given worlds to go with his man, but he knew that he would be recognized; whereas the odds were that Bob was not known as being associated with him.

Out came the car, and, with a nod of intelligence in reply to his master's last words imploring him to do his best and to lose no time, the chauffeur-groom set her going in the direction of Smeltby.

In less than an hour Jack's anxious ears caught the sound of the Rolls-Royce electric siren, approaching at a pace which suggested that all speed regulations were being ignored in the most gross manner. His heart leaping with expectation and fear, he made his way into the market-place to meet his man as soon as possible. Polly was down by this time, but Jack felt that he could not talk to any one of his fears until Bob's return.

The car came shooting round the south-eastern corner of the market-square out of the little narrow

and winding street which led to the bridge over the Saelig on the road to Smeltby. So eager was Bob that he did not take the clutch out or change gear till he was right on the hotel, when he put the brakes on in a way which would have ensured him a good talking to at any other time.

"He've eloped with her, master. He've taken her off in a blarmed motor-bicycle and side-car as go like billy-oh! I have heard it at the black-smith's, Ben Platt's. They ha' gone South, and that's all I can tell ye!"

"Did she go willingly?" asked Jack, his heart in his throat. "Oh, Bob, did she go willingly?"

"I can't say nothin' more," replied Bob. "But I reckon she didn't! Why, master, you ha' heard what Polly say. Would she go willin' now? What do you think?"

"And you don't know where they went?" cried Jack, half frenzied.

"And that's a fact," replied Bob sadly.

Jack thought for a moment, looked at his watch, found it was only just past seven, but nevertheless rushed round to the telegraph office, where he found a girl sweeping out the office.

"Military message," he said curtly. "It must be sent at once."

"The office ain't opened yet, sir," said the gaping sweeper.

"If the telegraph operator is not here in five minutes," said Jack, "I shall report the matter to District Headquarters."

Within the time the postmaster came down, apologizing. "You see you ain't in uniform, sir," he said. "Now, what is it?"

Hastily Jack drew the message.

"Flight-Commander Partridge: Flying Corps, Herringhaven. Go up at once. Look for motor-bicycle and side-car making South. Man and girl started Smeltby half hour. For God's sake lose no time and let me know earliest possible.—Ranworth."

"Get that through at once," he said to the post-master. He paid the necessary sum and returned towards the hotel. But before he entered the archway he swung round with a bitter curse. "Fool that I am!" he said. "There is the sign of the National Telephone outside the post office. Lord knows how long that wire will be getting delivered. But if I can get the C.O. on the 'phone it may save a couple of hours, and that will make all the difference."

He ran back to the post office and found the postmaster engaged in slowly hammering at the telegraph instrument's keys.

"Never mind that now," cried Jack. "Put me

on to the Commanding Officer at Herringhaven. No doubt you know the number and the connection. Make haste, my dear man. It is of vital importance."

The postmaster, who knew with whom he was dealing, and who took pride in the credit Jack had brought upon his county, left the instrument, disturbed by a fear lest Jack should have private intelligence of a landing by the enemy on some part of the Daneshire coast.

"I'll get it in one moment, sir," he said. "The military receivers are always at work. Half a moment, sir."

He went to the telephone and rang, and Jack heard him asking for a number. Presently the postmaster issued from the little cubby hole where the instrument was installed.

"They are there, Captain," said the postmaster. "Will you take the 'phone?"

Jack hurried to the instrument. "You there? Yes. I am Captain Jack Ranworth. I want Colonel Bridgewater. What? Well, send for him and tell him who it is that wants him. Look sharp! It's urgent."

There was a little delay, during which Jack soothed his impatience by a continual cry of "Are you there?" into the receiver. He knew well

enough that it was useless to keep on asking this question. But he had to do something. And this was all he could think of. At last, after about five minutes, he recognized the Colonel's voice at the other end of the wire.

"That you, Ranworth? What on earth is up?"

Hastily, almost breathlessly, Jack told his story. "There is not a moment to lose, sir," he said. "Those Indians can do forty or fifty at least. And they may dodge out of sight unless they are sought for at once. Will you send up Bertie Partridge as soon as he can get started? For God's sake do, sir. I know it is not a military matter. But—oh, well, I'd give my decoration for the use of Bertie and his bus just now."

Jack thought he heard a chuckle at the other end of the wire. "Does your father know and approve?" was the only remark that came to him clearly.

"Yes, sir, yes. We've mapped out a tactical scheme together. He approves and wishes me luck. He is going to help."

No one knew better than Jack that it was quite unorthodox for a military or naval 'plane to be used save on service matters. But he also knew that now and then the rigid rule could be relaxed, and he prayed as he had rarely prayed before that the C.O.

would consider this case to be one which justified an exception.

There was a brief pause before he heard the C.O. say, " All right. I'll do it for you. Don't worry. Look out for Partridge in the air. He must come close over by you and you'll hear his engine. Good luck."

The Colonel rang off before Jack could thank him, and with his nerves all fretted by his anxiety the young fellow made his way back to the hotel.

Bob had already filled the tank of the Rolls-Royce with " juice." Had seen that the two automatics, which still remained after the loan of the six-shooter to Mary, were in perfect order, their inserted magazines charged, and each with three other spare charged magazines ready to slip into their places as soon as the first clips should be exhausted. The car was drawn up in the market-place outside the *King's Head.* Bob had heaped rugs in it, and at the moment was busy packing a hamper with provender and drinks. He was a handy man, was Bob, and Polly helped him with a swift dexterity which aroused his admiration for her more and more.

" Run down for Sam Buttle," said Jack. " We may as well take him."

" I ain't goin' to leave you, master," said Bob. " Polly, me dear, haven't you got any one who can

run down to the staith and fetch old Sam? I say, master. We shall have to cross the bridge. Let Sam wait for us on the bridge. It will save time."

"Good idea, Bob," said Jack.

Polly thought for a moment. "There is Tom, the bootboy," she said. "I'll send him. Grandfaa'er won't mind, seein' it's for you."

Tom, a youth of about eighteen, very fleet of foot, presently came sprinting out through the archway, and turning to the right started to run down to the river at his best speed.

"Now, Master Jack," said Polly coaxingly, "you must take bit and sup before you go. That's no good goin' out on a expedition like this on an empty belly. Bob, your breakfast is ready in the kitchen; and I have got something ready for you in your room, Master Jack," urged the girl. "I'll wait out here."

"You've got to look for an aeroplane, Polly," said Jack. "If you see one coming from Herring-haven way, let me know at once."

"That's all right," said Polly. "I ha' seen scores of 'em. Now go you along like "—she pulled herself up and blushed at her narrow escape of having said "like a dear" to the Captain—"like a gentleman!"

The end was rather tame, but Jack knew what she meant, and his campaigning experience had taught

him that the girl was right. It is better to start on an adventure which might need strength, courage and endurance well fed than empty.

He hurried into the room where his meals were usually served, and, though he was still aflame with anxiety, he managed to do justice to one of those marshland breakfasts which have already been described in detail. Although it was still so early in the morning, he did not refuse the tankard of noble home-brewed which was brought in to him as he was finishing his plate of collared eel. He knew the sustaining virtue of sound malt and hops, and he guessed that with the start the enemy had obtained it would be a long chase, this stern chase which he hoped would terminate in the rescue of his darling.

He was tilting the tankard high above his face when Polly came rushing in. "That's coming, Master Jack!" she cried, wild with excitement. "That's coming. That's a-hummin' like a threshin' machine and a-comin' quick as a woodcock fly. Here ta come."

Jack put down his tankard hurriedly and accompanied the girl out into the market-place. In the air was the sound of thrumming which seemed to possess a power of unlimited crescendo. Jack made a shield of his right hand for his eyes and looked up in the air towards Herringhaven. He saw a speck

growing larger every moment. He stepped to the car and took out the prismatic binoculars from their case in the door. Then he again sought for the thrumming air craft. He fixed it, and saw that it was coming swiftly towards Smeltby.

"Bob," he called, as he hustled into his motoring coat, cap, and goggles. "Oh, Polly, make Bob come out at once."

Polly, who loved Mary and was almost as anxious that she should be saved from the kidnapper (the girl had no doubt that Mary had been kidnapped by Purchase in some dastardly manner), ran at her best pace to the kitchen, whence Bob immediately appeared, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand and casting a regretful glance over his shoulder at the place where he had been enjoying the good food and drink so dear to the soul of every healthy man who is a man. Polly came demurely behind him. In Bob's presence the girl never gave way to the excitement and freedom of manner which she did not mind showing before Jack.

"Start her, Bob," said Jack. "We must be off."

For a moment Bob's eyes sought the sky till they saw the object from which issued the tremendous thrumming. The 'plane was now over Smeltby and was circling as though to spy out the country before darting forward again in a direct line.

Bob swung the lever, for the Rolls-Royce was not a self-starter, and at once the engine purred.

"I'll drive at first," said Jack, entering the car and taking the wheel.

Then Bob, seeing that Polly stood looking at him with some anxiety in her pretty eyes, calmly went to her, took her in his arms and kissed her thrice on the lips, hard, before she had time to protest, if any intention of protesting was in her mind. Probably there was none, for when she emerged from his embrace her face was aflame with colour, but there was no indignation in the look she turned on her lover.

"Why, Bob! Whatever will Master Jack think?" was all she said.

"I congratulate you both," cried Jack, with the last laugh he was to have for some hours.

Bob sprang into the car, Jack pressed the accelerator, let in the clutch, changed gear and spun down the narrow winding hill to the bridge. Bob's last sight of Polly that morning showed her standing in front of the *King's Head* waving her handkerchief in encouragement.

It seemed as if the 'plane had been watching the motions of the car; for no sooner did Jack get under way than it headed south and took a steady direction at a tremendous speed. Jack knew that it was

impossible for any land-driven vehicle to keep up with a modern 'plane, doing its 120 to 130 miles an hour, or even more with the following wind which was then behind the one speeding through the Daneshire air. But he was content. He knew that as soon as Bertie or his observer had sighted anything which looked like Purchase's Indian he would communicate with him, Jack.

The car swung down the hill towards the river at such a pace that it was lucky that the wagons from the malthouses and tanneries had not yet got about their work. At the foot of the hill was the bridge and on the near side of that ancient granite edifice stood a smart middle-sized man dressed as a yachting skipper. Jack hardly slowed the car at the bridge-head, but Sam Buttle—for of course the waiting man was he—swung himself on to the step as it swept past, and in an instant was over the door of the tonneau and seated comfortably inside.

Sam was not a man to ask questions. He disposed himself in comfort, found his pipe was alight, and leant back at ease, until his young master should call upon him to do something.

The 'plane was now far ahead to the south, and presently Jack turned sharply in the same direction and followed at all the speed he could get out of his magnificent car dead in the track of the flying man.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST CHASE

"I HOPE to goodness he won't get so far ahead as to be out of sight," said Jack, as he swung round a corner on two wheels. "I can hear her, but she must be the deuce of a way ahead."

"I can see her, Master Jack," said Bob, leaning his mouth towards Jack's ear so that the rush of air caused by the terrific speed should not make his words inaudible. "But she is travellin' somethin' fast!"

The road now swung round to the great expanse of marshland, where the long bare roads, or dams, rendered speed less dangerous than in the high hedged country lanes. Across the dams the Rolls-Royce ate up the ground at nearly seventy miles an hour. Only twice was there danger in these wild districts, when a small pig cart, jogging along slowly, was hidden by the winding of the dam and by the edging of pollard willows which fringed the

roadway. In both cases the driver had heard the continual whistle which Jack kept going, but according to the nature of his kind kept in the middle of the road the more stubbornly. However, as the Rolls-Royce drew near the rush of her made the driver look round startled and enabled him to pull on one side on to the grass just in time. His expression as he saw the car roaring along at such a pace as he had never imagined possible would have been a study for any painter student of Daneshire rustic life.

Only when the car was more than a hundred yards distant did one of these men recover sufficiently to shake his fist at her retiring shape. "You ought to be locked up, you ought," he said. "Lord! if you was to come on a flock o' sheep or a herd o' young things!"

But Jack recked little of any dangers of the road. He let her out and let her out till Bob himself felt qualmish and Sam Buttle prayed inwardly in a curious mixture of devotion and blasphemy.

"Can you see the 'plane, Bob?" asked Jack, swerving suddenly to avoid an old sow and her farrow which were toddling along the dam plucking at the lush grass beside the roadway.

The swerve sent Bob hard against the side of the car. He gasped. "No, sir," he said. "I couldn't

see one o' them Zepperlins with all this water in my eyes ! ”

“ Can you, Sam ? ” shouted Jack.

Sam bent forward over the backs of the front seats. “ What did he say ? ” he shouted in Bob's ear.

“ Can you see the flyin' machine ? ” shouted Bob in answer.

Now Sam had seen no flying machine—had never seen one. He sank back into his seat. “ I reckon the young master's gone crazy,” he said. “ That blamed *Dragon-fly* is bad enough ! But this ! Oh lor ! ”

Several pickets had been passed during the rush. But Colonel Bridgewater had fortunately provided Jack with a flag or banner which gave free passage without any interference, and this Bob waved when there was a sign of khaki in the distance.

But now the way led through one or two towns of considerable size, and through these it was impossible to roar along at the speed hitherto maintained.

“ Confound it,” he said, as he slowed down to the speed of twenty miles an hour as he approached the considerable town of Haxworldham. “ This will give them a longer start.”

“ Not a bit of it, sir,” said Bob, who could now breathe and speak for the first time since the Rolls-Royce had been put on to her top speed with the

accelerator well down. "T'others couldn't go no faster through here."

"But they may not have come through here," objected Jack.

"Then why did we?" asked Bob, reasonably. "We came through here 'cos it's the nearest way to anywhere south. If t'others went round they must ha' gone a long way round. That's all right, Master Jack. You keep on a-goin' as fast as 'tis safe and we'll catch 'em if that there flyin' contraption has got 'em in sight."

They were full seventy miles from St. Mary's-on-the-Fen by this time, and Jack began to wonder if Purchase meant to take his prisoner to London. They cleared the town and the car speeded up little by little till it was again going at such a pace that it was difficult to breathe, and Bob and Sam, who were without goggles, felt their tears running down their cheeks while they could hardly see.

Suddenly the thrum of the aeroplane hummed even above the roar of the tremendous pace of the car. The Rolls-Royce on the top speed is practically silent. It is only the noise made by the disturbance of the air that sends a singing through the ears, and this was not enough to mute the thrum of the 'plane which was rapidly approaching overhead.

Jack, intent on the wheel and the levers, the pedals and his course, was the last to hear the noise of the flying machine's exhaust. Bob touched him again. "Here it comes, Master Jack. Hold you on and have a look round."

Jack withdrew his foot from the accelerator, and the car slowed. Now the sound of the 'plane was insistent. He let out the clutch, and as the car stopped slipped into the neutral. Then he reached for his binoculars.

But there was no need of them. Overhead, like a great gull, the monoplane was circling in curves which brought her nearer to the ground every moment. To the left of the road was a 20-acre field which had cropped hay and clover and was now a fairly level expanse. Swiftly the 'plane spiralled down, and then, with a springy touch and jump it ran and settled on the land.

The pilot was seen to clamber out and he was followed by his observer. Both the flying men made their way swiftly towards the field gate nearest to the spot where Jack had stopped the car.

"Hullo, old thing," said Bertie. "I've located 'em for you. They went into a lonely sort of house about thirty miles distant. My observer, Ted Charlesworth, here—let me introduce you—spotted 'em as they dodged off the high road. My attention

was taken up with the old bus who has been playing me tricks this morning. She is as fast as a driven grouse and faster. But a mono wants more attention than one of our new biplanes. Ted, tell Ranworth what you saw."

In a few words, with military brevity and point, the observer explained that he had first picked up the cycle-car some twenty minutes after rising.

"They must have had some special *permis* too," he said, "for I saw that they hardly slowed at the picket station. Of course, I can't say it's the one you are after. But it is the only one I saw. We followed them, and I fancy we upset the man who was driving. He slowed down more than once to have a look at us. They turned off the mainroad near the marshes in the valley of the Pye and ran into the grounds of a good-sized house in a small park which stands away from every other building for I should think a mile. Of course, it may not be your crowd. But I'd bet on it."

"Can you come on with us?" asked Jack.

"No, old thing," said Bertie. "The C.O. gave me leave to locate your lot. But said that I was to get back as soon as possible after I'd done it, if I was successful. I've no doubt I've been successful with Charlesworth's help, so I must get back to the aerodrome as soon as possible. Do let me

know how things turn out. Got everything you want ? ”

“ Not quite,” replied Jack, grimly. “ But I’ve got enough to get everything I want, I believe. It’s been awfully good of you and the C.O., Bertie. But you won’t mind if I push on. But hang it. Can’t you spare Lieutenant Charlesworth ? How am I to spot the place ? ”

Charlesworth, eager for a bit of sport, looked pleadingly at his superior officer.

“ Oh well,” replied the flight commander. “ I dare say I can. There is nothing special to observe now, and I can make my way back and land all right without him. You’ll take the responsibility if the C.O. gets his rag out ? ”

“ Of course,” replied Jack, impatient to get on with it and find this solitary house of which Charlesworth had spoken.

“ Give me a start, then,” said the flight commander to his observer, “ and then you may as well go on with Captain Ranworth. It will certainly be easier for him to find the place with your assistance, for you told me it was off the cross-roads.”

“ Be as quick as you can,” urged Jack, fevered with anxiety at the thought of what might be happening under the roof of that out-of-the-way house.

Charlesworth gave him a sympathetic look. He was in love with a girl who was being pressed by her people to marry a middle-aged plutocrat, and he had a fellow-feeling for this ardent young D.S.O., who seemed so perturbed because of the kidnapping of his lady love. For Bertie had told him part of the story which Jack had confided to him when he saw him at Herringhaven, and the observer's heart warmed in sympathy.

In less than five minutes the intense roar of the aeroplane engines boomed over to the road. Jack and his companions saw the 'plane run along the ground and lift, and then go spirally up till it reached a height of about 1,000 feet. By that time Charlesworth was back in the road. He sprang into the tonneau and Jack set forth again.

But before the car gathered speed Bob had cried to his master, "Let him come by you, sir. He knows the way. I don't. I'll get in with Sam if you'll ease up."

The suggestion was too good to neglect.

Jack eased the car, and soon Lieutenant Charlesworth was sitting beside Jack, while Bob was alongside Sam. The latter greeted his fellow-employee with a sickly grin. "We ought to be thankful, Bob," he said, "if ever we see Chittenham again. I've rode on a train. But I've never rode on any-

thing that went like this here motor-car. Lord save us ! ”

“ Oh, go you on,” replied Bob. “ She’s as safe as houses and as fast as lightnin’ ! Set you still and you won’t come to no harm.”

As the car raced along the country roads—and there were fewer military pickets here, inland—the observer kept his eyes skinned. He had spent three months at the front and his eyes had been trained to observe and recollect every little detail of the visible ground beneath him. Like Jack, he had been wounded and was only getting his strength up before returning to France.

“ I got a photograph of the place,” he said shouting at Jack as the car roared along. “ But I don’t suppose I shall have to develop it. I think I can guide you straight there without it.”

“ Good luck ! ” said Jack, observing that there was a large case which might contain a camera slung round Charlesworth’s shoulders. “ Are we near now ? ”

“ Stop a moment,” said Charlesworth. “ I should like to stand up on the seat and have a look round.”

Immediately Jack slowed down the car and brought her to a standstill in about a hundred yards without using his brakes.

Charlesworth stood up on his seat and looked

round over the hedge. He gave a grunt of content. "The third turn to the left will bring you to the place," he said. "Lord! It looks a more dismal hole from here than it did from upstairs."

Jack now went on carefully lest he should pass one of the narrow side lanes which ran off the mainroad. Soon Charlesworth said, "Here you are. Swing round to the left now. We are within a quarter of a mile."

Jack let out the clutch, swung round the wheel, and the car turned sweetly into a rather narrow by-road fringed with very high hedges. The lane—for it was a lane rather than a road—ran downhill, and now that there was no especial necessity for speed—for Jack did not believe that even Purchase would be so vile as to do more than attempt to compromise the girl—the car squelched easily and smoothly through the moist mud which one generally finds in by-roads in Daneshire where there are farms in the neighbourhood.

Down, down, went the lane, past corn and hay stacks, past stubble fields and root fields. Two coveys of partridges whirred up from the hedgerows whither they had taken refuge from the advent of this thing that was a monster to them. Ahead, through a fringe of tall poplars and unpollarded willows, could be seen a small stretch of marsh.

Not like the mighty spaces of Daneshire northward, But sufficient to account for the character of the neighbourhood. Near the end of this lane a ramshackle pair of wrought-iron gates gave entrance to a drive which was covered with grass and which was dank and dismal by reason of the avenue of elms which shrouded its fetid moisture from the clear sky. If ever there was a place suited to dark deeds, this was one. The lodge at the gates was in a ruinous condition, and it did not appear that there was any one in charge of it. Even the buoyant Charlesworth's spirits became depressed as Jack swung the car through the gates, and drove her slowly and silently along the reeking, fetid roadway. Stinkfungus sent its ghastly reek up in the air from the thickets bordering the drive. Nettles and thistles grew to an abnormal size in the clear spaces between the trunks of the elm boles. The latter were mostly covered with a sickly yellow fungoid growth. The whole atmosphere of the place was ominous, tragic, eerie. There were the marks of a motor-bicycle and side-car to confirm Charlesworth's assertion that this was where he had seen the persons he was watching turn in. But, as Jack urged the car on through the deplorable slush, a mixture of very old laid gravel and of soil made by fallen leaves, he doubted if the observer could be right.

Was it possible that any man would bring the girl of his heart to such a place if he desired to win her for his own ?

There was no sign of life save such as the rodents of the land had left. The elms were bare of birds. No songster cheered the dankness of the dripping trees.

At last the avenue terminated in a clearing which showed up a flint-built house of considerable size and, apparently, of immense age. It was not like those splendid dark red-brick Elizabethan houses which one finds in Daneshire more frequently than in any other county. Its date seemed to be far antecedent to Elizabeth's time. Yet some of the thatch on the roof—for it was a thatched house—gave evidence of recent care. For there were hideous patches of yellowy grey reeds which had newly been laid on the old roof and which looked dirty and garish upon the slate-coloured lichen and moss-grown surface of the old thatch. It looked meretricious. A curious word to use in such connection, but the one which best gives the idea that is required.

The hall door was of dark oak and its trappings were of old rusty hammered iron. From out one of the chimneys—these were more modern and were clearly of Jacobean architecture—a thin smur of

smoke lifted lazily into the air. A ray of sunshine bursting through the foliage of the elms which surrounded this dismal habitation looked as out of place as a pierrot at a funeral.

A sense of depression held all four of those in the car silent and oppressed. So moist was the soil that the Rolls-Royce with her silent engines scarce made a sound as she rolled gently up to the moss- and grass-grown space in front of the hall door.

Jack stopped the car ten yards from the building. He spoke in a whisper, more because of the influence of the dismal surroundings than because he thought there was any need for silence.

"Now we are here, what are we to do?" he murmured in Charlesworth's ear. He had instinctively felt the young lieutenant's sympathy with him, and although he would have relied on the true service of Bob and Sam even to death, it was a relief to have a gentleman with whom he could discuss ways and means.

"Can this be the place?" he asked.

In reply Charlesworth pointed to the ruts made by what were evidently the tyres of a motor-bicycle and a side-car.

"This is where the motor-bike I spotted came," said Charlesworth. "Of course, I can't swear that it is the one you are after."

" But I can," cried Bob Mallett, who had descended from the car and who was closely examining the marks made by the tyre of the bicycle. " I can. I took a look at those I saw at Smeltby in the dust. See here, Master Jack. See that wriggly contraption like as though a viper had crawled over the tyre and left its dirty mark. Well, I saw that in the dust against Smeltby Hall. This is where they come. I'll bet ye a penny on it ! Beg your pardon, sir," he said, pulling himself up as he realized that he had spoken with too great familiarity to the young master.

Jack's heart sunk. Every one of those present felt depressed. No one, at least no stranger, could be cheerful in that place.

" Can you see any one or anything at the windows ? " asked Jack.

There was silence for a few moments. Then said Sam Buttle, who spoke with an air of assurance for the first time since he had leapt aboard at St. Mary's bridge, " There's a pair o' eyes a peerin' at us from the ground-floor window right o' the door."

Encouraged by his success in seeing something the others missed, Sam looked round. He, too, sprang from the car, and presently returned with a pistol in his hand.

It was Jack's small Webley and Scott, with its magazine and cartridges intact.

"I see this layin' against the holly hedge by the east corner of the house," said Sam. "The glint o' the sun just caught it. That's a rum un, that is. That hain't been here long or that would ha' been all rust."

Jack took the pretty little weapon in his hand. Yes, there could be no mistake. There were his initials, engraved on the sleeve.

At that moment a report cracked from an upper window which had been stealthily opened and a bullet whizzed close by Jack's cheek.

"Come on, Ranworth," cried Charlesworth, enlivened by the suggestion of a fight. "Come on. We must storm the place."

CHAPTER XIV

AT SMELTBY

THE three days which followed Mary's last interview with Jack and rejection of Clunes Purchase were more full of dread for the girl than circumstances justified—so far as could be estimated from the apparent condition of affairs. She had been permitted to use her own apartments practically without any interference. She had rejoiced when Polly Young brought her the little automatic. With that, she felt, she could always protect herself from any of the unknown dangers which she believed threatened her. One of her chief causes of fear was her inability to define the danger which she felt about her. After the first day, as the Princess had contented herself with sending messages to Mary's rooms expressing a hope that she was better, the girl thought that she would make herself ridiculous by confining herself to her private apartments. She went down to lunch and dinner in the usual way on the second day, and she was glad to find that the

Princess alone was her companion, that Shri Gunga Ram kept out of the way. It is true that the Yogi never took his meals with the Princess. The latter had long since given up adhering to the strict code of Brahmin law. Indeed, her marriage with a Feringhee had deprived her of all caste, and it would have been absurd for her to continue the stringent rules as to eating and washing, showing the face, etc., etc., which are vital to the true female Buddhist, since she had placed herself outside the pale of Nirvana for ever. That Shri Gunga should continue to be her guest and accomplice comforted her. She was not free from the bondage of the belief of her race. And she reverenced Shri Gunga as an apostle of the great Buddha. That she also used him for worldly matters was typical of her Eastern breeding. Gunga himself, with his dispensations, believed that he held his patroness in the palm of his hand and had no doubt that she would bequeath all she had to bequeath to the Buddhist monastery of which he was a priest.

That the man had strange powers may be doubted by those who never encountered him or his like, who never witnessed the strange strengths and weaknesses of the Eastern Buddhist adepts. But one must remember that while in Europe hypnotism is in its infancy, in the north-west hills of India and in

Thibet it has been part of the training of Jogis and Gosains for the last two thousand years or more. The Princess understood this, but Mary did not, and consequently she had seen no harm in permitting the Yogi to put her to sleep to ease her pain.

The Yogi himself was probably more doubtful of the outcome of the plot to marry the girl to Purchase than was the Princess or Purchase himself. Shri Gunga had been puzzled, as he was puzzled when he found that Jack Ranworth's appeal to our Saviour had neutralized those powers which he had brought to such a high state of efficiency. And Gunga Ram was no fool. He was a philosopher in the truest sense of the word. In helping Purchase to marry Mary he did not consider that he was doing anything wrong. Nay, he rather thought that he was meritorious, since it would enable the Princess to add to her store of wealth which she had promised to bequeath to the monastery whose servant Gunga was.

He had been able to subdue Mary's mind to his hypnotic powers. But only partially. He had soothed her pain. But, although the Princess did not know it, he had tried if his power would make her do certain things which he suggested to her while she was under his influence. In this he failed. He found that he could numb her senses, but that he

could not influence her so that she would be active in his service. He might be able to prevent her from doing this or that. But he feared that he would have difficulty in making her an active agent. Of this he alone was aware. He, a Buddhist Yogi, with no experience of the world of European men and women, who had seen nothing of England since he came over save the deplorable people within the precincts of Smeltby Hall, did not realize how a girl could resent the idea of marriage with a man whom she hated. Indeed, he could not understand how an unmarried girl could hate a young man. Love and hate had nothing to do with marriage in his creed. He had no notion of the horror with which Mary regarded a union with Purchase. He favoured this union because his patroness desired it, and because he would rather see a girl whom he rather admired wedded to a man with some Brahmin blood in him than to a Feringhee. Gunga was not a bad man. Indeed, he had the soul of a good one, a very good one. But he did not understand.

There were few beings he hated. Of course he considered that any association with the unclean defiled him. And all the Sahibs were unclean. Still, he did not hate the Sahibs. He did hate, however, the lunatic sons of the Princess who had insulted him in many beastly ways, whom he knew

to be more animal than human, and who his faith led him to believe were the incarnations of vile souls who were born as lunatics because of their evil existence in a previous life. And a Buddhist Yogi is inexorably cruel if he thinks it right. More than once the unfortunate idiots suffered under the thongs of their keepers because of complaints made by Gunga Ram. His hypnotic power had some, but not much, effect upon them. And what it had was resented by them. They were sane enough to know that in Gunga they had a man who loathed them rather than hated them, and who thought it his duty that they should be disciplined severely in order to cleanse their souls for a better existence in their next lives. I do not mean to say that the lunatics understood the reason of Gunga's loathing and the really benevolent thought he had when he ordered their castigation. But they did know they had suffered because of him, and they feared and hated him more than any other living creature.

On the evening of the second day after the arrangement had been made between the Princess, Purchase and Shri Gunga, the Princess summoned the Yogi to her in her own room, which was arranged and furnished in a style as near to that of her quarters in her father's palace as she could compass.

The Princess was lying at full length on an

Eastern couch, and to Gunga's reverence she hardly paid attention.

"You'll be able to get that girl to do as she is told to-morrow, Shri Gunga," said the Princess.

"If I have access to her and can fix her gaze, yes," replied the Yogi. "But I find that she is less subject to my influence than most people. It is curious that here, in England, Krishna seems more powerful than Buddha. Only the other day an appeal to Krishna struck all weapons from my hand. And Lady Mary prays to Krishna. I will do what I can. I think I can make her passive. But I doubt if I can use her as an instrument at a distance as I can one of your foolish Western infidels or one of our own blood and faith."

"Oh well," said the Princess. "So long as you can make her passive, it ought to be sufficient. When she finds out that she is in the power of our friend, half of our blood, and has compromised her fair name, she will marry him. Then he will gain the treasure, half of it will be mine—he has sworn it both by Krishna and by Buddha, by Kali and by the Virgin—I shall have the more for your monastery, as you know."

Gunga Ram shuddered a little. That a man not an idiot should swear by Krishna and Buddha seemed to him possible. The two characters

were so entirely beautiful, so similar in their love for poor humanity and their doctrine of mercy and self-sacrifice that there did not seem to the Buddhist priest, fanatic though he may have been, any blasphemy in their association. But that the Virgin Mary, pure, sweet-souled Mary, the child who heard the glory of the words of annunciation and trembled at the divine honour bestowed upon her, should be associated with blood-stained Kali of all the Hindu deities seemed to the Yogi horrible.

He stood silent for a moment, his wide unwinking eyes, with their expression of infinite pity and love, bent earthwards. In India of course, he had seen no women, or at least discoursed with very few. That a woman of the finest blood of his country should imagine such an association shocked him horribly. But women were ignorant, he told himself. No doubt all the Princess wished was to fix Purchase on a harrow-like oath, so that if he were not caught on one prong he would be caught on another.

It was not for him to protest. He had been sent here by his superiors to gather wealth from the Princess. He would obtain dispensation for anything provided he succeeded in obtaining the spoil

Yet the soul of the man of the East recoiled from

the evil woman, and he was forced to brace himself to continue the conversation.

"It is good," he said at length.

"Well, do you think you had better subdue Mary to-night or to-morrow morning?" asked the Princess. "There will not be much time in the morning. And if your—your magic lasts it would be better to-night."

The use of the word "magic" offended Gunga Ram. But again he remembered why he was at Smeltby. He bowed and spread out his hands subserviently. He, who could have wrecked the brain and person of the wretched woman who lay before him, proud in her own control, as she thought, of this famed Yogi.

"Perhaps," he said, "to-night. The spirit of the Feringhee is less alive at night than in the early morning, save when one may come upon them with the heaviness of sleep still dulling their souls."

The Princess took up a kind of drum-stick which lay near her and struck three times upon a Thibetan gong which was slung close beside her couch.

Emma, the maid, entered. As always, the girl was terrified to come into that room. She sensed something evil, something which shocked her Faith, brought up as she had been by a devout father and mother, communicants of the Church of England.

"Tell Miss Mary I wish her to come here," said the Princess.

Through the open door came the horrible howls and shrieks which only issue from the lips of the insane. Shri Gunga pressed his arms over his chest, and held his eyes firm fixed to the ground. Presently Mary entered.

"What is it, Princess?" said the girl, feeling in a little pocket she had persuaded Emma to make in her tea gown, in which reposed the automatic Polly had given her the previous day.

"I hope you are less prejudiced against Clunes Purchase," said the Princess. "He has asked me to invite you to go for a drive in his side-car to-morrow. You will oblige me by accepting his invitation."

"But I can't," cried Mary, her eyes flaming and her cheeks paling. "I can't. Princess, it would not be right, according to English notions, for a girl to go for a drive with a man like him unless she loved him."

Poor Mary's definition of motoring etiquette was, I fear, not one which would be endorsed by the modern flapper. But she had no other weapon.

Shri Gunga looked at the Princess and she understood, and was silent.

"He has brought you something very beautiful,

my child," said the Yogi, producing from under his white robe a diamond as big as a hazel nut, which sent its gleams all over the room.

Despite herself, Mary's eyes rested on the splendid jewel, and the sparkle fascinated her. Presently Gunga exercised every grain of his tremendous will power. The girl raised her eyes and enabled Gunga to look full in them.

For a moment there was a struggle, plain to see in the girl's features. Her face became almost contorted. Her eyes seemed to turn inward. And then her features and her eyes grew peaceful. There was a mindless calm upon the former and in the latter. She stood without speaking.

Gunga spoke in the ear of the Princess, who at once said, "Very well then, dear. I do not wish to force you to do anything you do not like. Good night."

Without a word, the vacant expression still depriving her face of much of its beauty, Mary turned and left the room.

"D'you think it will be satisfactory?" asked the Princess.

"She will go with him without struggling. She will go with any one without struggling. I will endeavour to influence her so that he alone shall seem to be her fit companion and her proper husband.

But—I doubt, I doubt. She must not pray to Krishna to-night. Have you any one you can trust to prevent her from doing that ? ”

“ No,” replied the Princess.

“ Then all I can promise is that she shall be passive. That should be enough. I fear the influence will not last more than a week, even if I send my astral messages to her throughout every day. But I do not know. There is much, Princess, which is hidden from me. We can only hope and pray to the Lord Siddartha for the best.”

When Purchase arrived very early on the following morning he found Mary vacantly and placidly submissive. She made no resistance when he and the Yogi helped her into the side-car. Emma was carefully kept out of the way, as were the other British servants. Mary hardly replied to Purchase's greeting. She said a dull good morning ; permitted herself to be packed in and made safe in the side-car, and sat there, vacant eyed, motionless with no apparent desire to leave the seat. She permitted goggles to be placed over her eyes. She had eaten the food offered her previously. It was as though she were an automaton.

When the powerful Indian cycle had raced off, the Princess, who had watched the departure from

a window, sent for the Yogi, who had been similarly occupied.

"Well?" said the Princess. "It seems safe. She seems willing to do as she is told. Do you think she will continue like that long enough?"

"I cannot say," replied Gunga Ram. "I cannot say. It mostly depends upon my being able to send out the rays from my aural self to follow and hold her. I may even be able to force her to action if she continues under this control another twelve hours. For my power grows with time."

"Where did you get that stone?" asked the Princess, showing more interest in her question than she had hitherto exhibited even concerning Mary's marriage.

The Yogi bowed and smiled. "Ah!" he said. "You too? There was no stone, Princess. It was but an illusion."

The Princess dared not contradict him. But she knew he lied.

Suddenly through the open door came the howls and yells of the lunatics whom their keepers were brutally whipping because they had, that morning, objected to be sluiced over with water and scrubbed with a floor brush.

"Oh, shut the door," said the Princess, growing a little pale beneath her white veil.

The Yogi did as he was requested, and shuddered violently at the hideous noise.

He wondered why it was that these bestial cries should so affect him. He had seen and heard worse and more horrible things in his native land and looked on them as mere matters of discipline.

CHAPTER XV

THE RESCUE

THE pistol shot which had come so nigh to wounding Jack spurred the fighting instincts of all the rescuing party. That a cold-blooded attempt at murder should be perpetrated before any hostile act on the part of Jack and his companions infuriated the four men. But it was Charlesworth alone whom it seemed to fill with joy. He was younger, more irresponsible than Jack, and he had not seen the horrors of war from the air as Jack had seen them in the trenches.

Without a second's delay he snatched the service revolver which he wore in a holster at his waist from its leathern case and fired point blank at the window from which the shot had come.

"Steady on, for God's sake," cried Jack, seizing the young lieutenant's arm before he could send a second shot after the first. "You don't know whom you may hit."

At this Charlesworth looked a little shamefaced

"No, begad," he said. "I forgot that. Sorry."

While the two army men were still some yards from the walls of this dismal mansion, Bob Mallett and Sam Buttle had pressed close up to the door. They tried it and found it give to their pressure. Evidently Purchase—if it were he who had fired, which seemed beyond doubt—had not expected to be attacked so speedily.

"We can get in, Master Jack," cried Sam, with is shoulder against the door. "Come you on and we'll l'arn him, whoever 'tis, to shoot at a man without warnin'. Come on in, all of ye!"

"By Jupiter!" cried Charlesworth, "They've got the front door open. The game is in our hands."

"I don't like to take any one in but myself," objected Jack. "This is not your quarrel, Charlesworth. If in helping me you were injured, I should feel guilty of having deprived our air squadrons of an able officer. And the war should come before any personal interests."

"What about yourself, then?" asked Charlesworth, laughing. "Do you deny that you are an able officer? You insult the War Office by suggesting that the D.S.O. has been awarded to a man who is of little value."

Jack flushed. Charlesworth's point was irrefutable. But then he had an overwhelming love to

urge him on. Charlesworth would only run into danger from a love of "sport" and a sense of *camaraderie.*

He was still hesitating if he should permit the R.F.C. lieutenant to run the hazard of entering the house, when the latter solved the problem by rushing through the open door into the gloomy hall within. "Come on," he cried. "Come on. The sooner we get that swine the safer we shall be. I don't believe there is more than one man on the premises."

Jack dashed after the lieutenant, and in less than a minute all four of the allies were racing upstairs in the direction of the window from which the pistol shot had come.

They found the door of the room in which the window must be situated locked, and even as they hesitated outside it another shot crashed through the panels.

Sam Buttle shoved his master out of the way, withdrew to the further end of the passage opposite the door, and then with a shout dashed with a springing leap against the woodwork.

The old door could not stand such an impact, and fell inwards letting the skipper tumble awkwardly over its ruins.

Though the room was dark because of the trees

outside, it was easy enough to see throughout it.

On one side of the window Clunes Purchase stood at bay, his lips drawn up in a snarl so that his teeth showed white against his dingy complexion.

In an armchair in a corner of the room Mary was seated, her eyes open but expressionless, her attitude that of a person in a state of coma.

"Mary!" cried Jack, hastening towards her.

There was, for an instant, a flicker of intelligence in her eyes, but it passed immediately and she sat on, motionless, like a girl in a state of catalepsy.

As Jack rushed, Purchase again took a flying shot at him, but missed, and before he could fire again Charlesworth and Bob Mallett were on him. They swung his hands behind his back and bound them, showing no excess of tenderness in their methods.

"Now what's to be done?" asked Charlesworth, looking round with laughing eyes at Jack.

Jack was kneeling beside Mary, who looked at him, but as though she did not see him.

"Get her out of this," cried Jack, suddenly. "There is something devilish here. The girl is drugged or something. She is not in possession of her senses. Mary, Mary," he cried pitifully. "Don't you know me? You are safe now. Safe."

But there was no change in the lifeless mask which

Mary wore. She sat indifferent to all, motionless.

"Won't you come with me?" asked Jack, placing his hands under her arms to raise her.

She showed no opposition. She rose, and when he took her hand to lead her, she followed him, but as one in a sleep.

"What shall we do with this swine?" asked Charlesworth.

"I'd better get the p'leece, master, hadn't I?" asked Bob.

"No, no," cried Jack. "We won't bother the police. Tie his legs to a chair, and then hunt through the house and see if he had the insolence to bring her to an empty house. Surely there must be some one else within these four walls."

Bob and Sam made Purchase fast, Sam delighting in using several intricate seaman's knots which would puzzle any ordinary person to untie. Purchase growled, cursed and snarled till Bob said, "Hadn't I better gag him, Master Jack?"

"No," said Jack, savagely. "Let him yell if he wants to. There is no one within hearing unless there is some one in the house, and I shall know how to deal with them. The more he yells the thirstier he'll get, and there is no chance of his getting a drink till he finds help."

Jack led Mary tenderly from the room, down the

stairs, and to the car. For a moment she seemed reluctant to get into the car, but only for a moment. And soon she was seated, well wrapped up, in the left seat beside that of the driver. Jack thought that the brisk air of swift motion as felt from a front seat might do something to revive her. He put goggles on her, and saw that her wraps were firm around her. Her hat and motoring coat and veil she still wore. Probably Purchase had not thought it worth while to remove them.

Bob and Sam, having made their cursing prisoner fast, began to search the house. Charlesworth followed Jack out into the drive, but stood apart, a pleased grin on his good-humoured face.

In about five minutes Bob and Sam came running out to say that they had found an old man and an old woman in the kitchen quarters, who had put up no fight at all. They had tied them up too, till Jack's pleasure should be ascertained.

"Let them loose," said Jack, "and tell them that in fifteen minutes they may release their master—for I suppose they are employed by that scoundrel half caste. Frighten them well, so that they will not let him go before."

"That we will and all," said Sam, with a grin, as he and Bob returned to the kitchen where they had found the old people.

It was probably less than half an hour from their arrival at the house when all four rescuers were ready to take their departure in the Rolls-Royce as bodyguards to the girl they had rescued.

" Made it all right with the old people ? " asked Jack.

Bob burst into a laugh. " You should ha' heard Sam here," he said. " If ever anybody put the fear of God into anybody else, he put it into them old rapscallions. They won't dare to get out o' their chairs till the clock on the kitchen mantelpiece show fifteen minutes ha' passed. Now where are we bound for, Master Jack ? "

Jack hesitated. Then he held a hurried conference with Charlesworth. Finally he said, " I am going to take this young lady to the *King's Head* and place her under the care of Polly Young. She knows her, and I can think of no one better."

" And that's a fact," said Bob. " If Polly can't look after her and bring her round to herself, I reckon no one can. Good on ye, Master Jack. Let's be a-goin', 'cos that stoat upstairs will be a-comin' on his motor bike soon as the old fools let him free."

The men clambered into the car, Charlesworth sitting behind Mary with Bob beside him, while Sam sat on the other side of the tonneau. Jack

started, and the Rolls-Royce moved off easily through the mud and slush.

From the upper room they could hear the howls and yells of Clunes Purchase, who was heaping abuse on his aged servants because they did not come to set him free.

"Lor! Hark at him!" said Bob. "Don't he sing like any old nightingale! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Jack swung the car into the lane, ran easily up to the mainroad, and headed for St. Mary's at full speed.

CHAPTER XVI

PROBLEMS

THE run back to St. Mary's was uneventful. But as the car neared Smeltby, Jack fancied that Mary showed signs of uneasiness, made half-hearted endeavours to release herself from her wrappings, and seemed to be ill at ease.

"It's that infernal Hindu conjurer," he said to himself. "He has put a spell upon her and it works the stronger when she is near him than at a distance. If ever I have him at my mercy, may his gods save him!"

And then, even as he controlled that mighty force of the Rolls-Royce engine, Jack's thoughts grew devout. He remembered how he had succeeded in escaping from the spell which Gunga Ram had tried to put upon him. And in his heart he was thankful to the Divine protection which he believed had saved him. Even as he held the wheel and worked the pedals his soul flew up in prayer to Him Whom Gunga Ram called "Krishna,"

that it might be vouchsafed to him to save this girl from the machinations of the Yogi and other worshippers of strange gods and to make her his own in honest British fashion. If he were spared, when he returned from the front he prayed that he and she might lead long and happy lives together, and he knew that he for one would not be wanting in recognition to Providence for its mercies.

And, curiously enough as the average person may think, while his divine essence, his soul, was communing with the Highest, Mary looked at him with eyes which held meaning in them, and the meaning seemed to be that she was more than grateful to him. He looked at her as much as he dared while he was driving at such a pace. And he thought he saw a little colour steal up in her cheeks.

But when the car shot over the bridge at the foot of St. Mary's, the girl's face was again set and expressionless. Jack told himself that the change he had thought he saw must have been imaginary, caused by some trick of light or shadow. Nevertheless he felt encouraged, and more determined than ever to see her safe from the dangers which beset her at Smeltby.

He sounded his siren loudly and frequently as the car shot up the winding hill to the market-place, and when he slowed down to drive into the

yard of the *King's Head*, Polly was standing in the archway and sprang aside to give passage to the car.

As soon as Jack stopped the car in the middle of the yard Polly came running to Mary.

"Oh, dear Miss Mary!" she cried. "Thank God they have brought ye back! Thank God! Come you out along of me and let me cosset ye up. You look half dead, and no wonder. What did ye want to drive so fast for comin' home, Master Jack?" she cried, throwing accusing glances at the Captain. "She's almost froze! Come you along of me, miss. I'll soon warm ye up and set your blood a-flowin' regular!"

Mary made no resistance when Polly helped her from the car. But neither did she seem to understand what was said to her, nor even to recognize the handmaid who had been so faithful to her, and to whom she owed so much.

"You can leave her to me, sir," said Polly to Jack. "You go in and eat the bit o' dinner I ha' got ready for you. I'll let you know how my young lady fares."

"You'll come and feed, Charlesworth?" said Jack.

"Can't," replied the lieutenant. "I must get back to Herringhaven without delay. When is the next train?"

"Train be hanged," said Jack. "Bob here will drive you over, won't you, Bob?"

"That I will and all," said Bob eagerly, "if Sam will promise not to eat up all the victuals. Polly told me she meant to have a rare old treat for us when we came back. But I reckon she can keep that hot for half an hour, and I shan't be longer."

So Jack and the lieutenant took leave of each other with hearty good wishes on either side, and mutual promises that the acquaintance begun in so dramatic a manner should not be permitted to die for lack of vivers.

"You wait in the kitchen, Sam," said Jack, as he turned to go into his private quarters to prepare himself for the meal.

But old Sam shook his head. "The *Belvedere* and the *Dragon-fly* have been left alone long enow, master," said he. "You can tell Bob, if he have time, he can bring me down somethin' if that's special good. But I shouldn't be doin' my duty by you or Sir John if I didn't make the best haste down to the staith. I don't want no one a-pryin' into the engines o' the *Dragon-fly*, though I hate the thing."

Jack laughed. "All right," he said. "Do as you choose. No doubt you are right. We may want both the *Belvedere* and the *Dragon-fly* to show

their best paces to-morrow. I shall probably send for you or go down to see you aboard before night. But have a drink before you go."

"Ah!" said Sam, his face brightening till it was wrinkled like a hothouse melon skin. "I *could* do with that. The sun ha' been above the foreyard this two hours and more!"

He went into the public bar, had his drink, and then hastened down to the river.

Jack enjoyed his meal. Polly had done her best, and the generous marshland fare put life and vigour into the young man. He was smoking his first cigar when Polly came into his private room.

"Can I speak with ye a minute, Master Jack, if ye please?" asked the girl.

She was paler than usual, and seemed ill at ease, and a little frightened.

"Of course," smiled Jack. "Nothing wrong, I hope. How is Miss Palmer?"

"That's just the point, Master Jack," replied Polly. "I don't know what to make of her. She pecked a bit of roast chicken, but only a morsel. And then she seemed to go off again into a kind o' open-eyed dream! That wholly puzzles me! She does as I tell her. But she doesn't seem to know me, or where she is, or to have a will of her own, and she used to have a rum un of a will and all!"

Polly's eyes grew wide with wonder. Then she hastened to add—for she feared lest she might have injured her beloved Miss Mary in the estimation of the man whom she had decided to be Mary's fit and proper mate—"I don't mean as she was outrageous, Master Jack. But only that she had a proper will of her own, like she ought to, seein' who and what she is. She always asked for anything very gentle and kind like, and always said please and thanky. But she knew what she wanted and saw she got it so far as them furriners would let her. But now, poor thing, she don't seem to have no will. She's as obedient as Bob Mallett." The girl pulled herself up, blushed, tittered, and then cried, "Lor now, whatever have I been and gone and said. You won't tell him, will ye, Master Jack?"

"I promise you I won't," said Jack, laughing in spite of the anxiety on Mary's behalf which Polly's news had caused. "I'm glad you've got Bob so well in hand."

"Lor', dear me! I don't know how I come to say such a thing," said Polly, still the colour of a boiled beetroot. "But there! There's no accountin' for gals' tongues, is there, sir?"

Jack laughed. Then he became grave again. "Do you mean," he asked, "that Miss Palmer

does not seem to realize where she is or who she is? That her mind seems affected?"

"No," cried Polly eagerly. "Tain't that. I believe it is that rum funny Indian man as have put something on to her.[1] I've heard from Emma, a maid at Smeltby, that he can put folk to sleep and cure their earaches and headaches and toothaches and that. Well, that appear to me as if he'd been a-doin' somethin' o' the kind to Miss Mary. I wish I'd cotched him at it, that I do," said the valiant girl champion.

Jack thought for a moment. Then he said, "Do you know, Polly, I believe you've hit it. It is just what I believe myself. Well, we must hope that time and the change of place and persons will restore her to her usual self quickly. But don't leave her long, there's a good girl. If you want to see me, I will come up and wait outside the door of the room you have put her in. I don't like to think of her being left alone. Remember that whatever she says or tries to do she must not be allowed to leave you to-night. To-morrow I mean to take her to her grandfather or to my father, whichever of the two seems best. I shall know more by the morning."

[1] Bewitched her.

Polly "bopped" a rustic curtsy and ran back to Mary.

She found a change in her patient. Mary's eyes were growing troubled, and she seemed to be muttering to herself.

"There, there, my dear," said honest Polly, trying to soothe "her young lady." "You're safe now. Master Jack will see nobody don't harm ye, ah! And so will Bob Mallett and all! Set ye down."

For Mary was evincing an inclination to rise from her chair.

The girl's face was now troubled, her breath was coming unevenly. She had twice made an attempt to rise from her chair and then resumed her seat.

"I know what," said Polly. "We want old Clinker Prettyman. They call him a wizard. But he's a good Christian and go to Church reg'lar. I've half a mind to send for him if she don't get better."

Jack went to the Post Office and telegraphed to his father, making certain arrangements for the next day.

As he issued from the office he saw Bob returning with the car, and beckoned to him to proceed on his way. By the time the Captain got back to the inn the car was garaged and Bob was busy washing her down and filling up her petrol tank.

GOVT. GIRLS COLLEGE SRINAGAR ACC. NO .....

After a short consultation Bob went off to the staith to give certain directions to Sam Buttle. Jack was under no delusion as to the course which the Princess and Purchase were likely to pursue. They would endeavour by hook or by crook, *vi et armis* if necessary, to regain possession of the girl who had escaped their clutches. That they would make a raid on the inn Jack did not believe. The danger would be when he took Mary from the inn, and his device was to mislead the enemy as to the manner of her going.

For some minutes he felt inclined to take her by rail. It would be difficult for violence to be offered on a platform or in the train. On the other hand, Mary's condition was such as to excite remark. And although Jack did not doubt that he was justified in his action, the Princess was undeniably Mary's legal guardian until such time as the General countermanded the authority he had given his wife. Should there be a *fracas* the Princess would have the police on her side, for Jack would be able to produce no shadow of authority for taking charge of a girl who did not seem to be in command of her senses. No, if he got her away to the care of his father or her grandfather he must depend on the strength of his own forces and the subtlety of his own brain.

By land or water he must get her away from St. Mary's to the North. And he thought he had evolved a very pretty scheme to enable him to do it.

He was about to endeavour to have another talk with Polly when fortune favoured him and a neat and rather dainty girl came tripping under the archway towards the private quarters of the Youngs. Bob nudged his master. "D'ye see her, sir?" he asked. "That's Susie Platt, that is. She looks somethin' upset, doesn't she?"

Indeed there were signs of tears about the girl's plaintive blue eyes, and her manner was irresolute and nervous.

"So that's Susie Platt, is it?" asked Jack. "Good luck. Now I *must* see Polly before she lets the girl leave the inn."

CHAPTER XVII

AN ANXIOUS NIGHT

JACK succeeded in obtaining an interview with Polly while Susie was still at the *King's Head*, and as a result of that interview Bob made his way to the wheelwright's to tell old Ben that his daughter would not return home that night and possibly might not be back till the night of the morrow. Old Ben took it very calmly. "She does as she likes," he said, scratching his grey head. "Since her mother died I ha' give up tryin' to steer her course. Anyway she's better away from here. I saw that Purchase come back on his motor-bike not long ago. I saw him go out with a gal this mornin', and he must ha' left her somewheres, for he came back alone. I couldn't see who she was. Her veil was that thick and he was goin' along like billy-oh ! That's just as well Susie should be out o' the way for a bit. You tell her she need not hurry back. Then if that rapscallion comes hankerin' round here he'll find both less and more than

he looks for. Gentry! Lor', he ain't so much gentry as I be! There ain't no gentry in the village since the General cut his stick 'cos that got too much for him with the howlin' lunies and all the witchcraft and rumcumfoozledom as ha' gone on at the Hall since he brought home his second lady! Princess is she? I'd princess her if I had my way. I'd see if she would float in the Saelig same as they did to old Granny Webster when I was a boy! But this won't do. Here I stand a mardlin'[1] when I ha' got two sets o' horse's shoes to finish in the hour. Fare ye well, master. Fare ye well. Tell Susie I can look after myself all right as I ha' often done before, and good luck to ye!"

"Ting, tang, bang!" came down the ringing hammer on the white-hot strip of iron on the anvil, and Bob left the smithy with that musical sound in his ears.

When Polly left the invalid in order to see what Susie wanted with her, she had substituted Nellie Wright, a buxom chambermaid, as nurse and guard. But Nellie seemed to have less control over poor Mary than Polly. Possibly because she was a stranger. Polly, Susie and Jack were in the midst of their discussion when Nellie's voice came ringing down the stairway.

[1] Gossiping.

Polly jumped up. "Well, we ha' settled that all right," she said. "Wait you here, Susie. And, Master Jack, you'd best let Sam know."

"I'll wait to hear what's wrong," said Jack.

Polly found Mary struggling with Nellie Wright. And although, before the attack of violence came suddenly on, the girl had seemed as lethargic and feeble as she had since her first discovery at the lonely house, yet now she was fighting for freedom like one possessed and with a muscular or nervous energy which was quite beyond her normal strength.

The arrival of Polly seemed to quiet her. She submitted to be seated again in the easy chair in which she was reposing when her attack came on.

"I shall get her to bed," said Polly, in her business-like manner. "That is the best place for her. Please God she will be better in the morning. More like herself."

Mary made no resistance when Polly led her to a bedchamber, and attired her in her own plain but clean linen for the night. She seemed to have confidence in Polly, and although she said nothing, she was evidently content to trust herself to her humble friend.

One thing seemed clear. That Mary could not be left unwatched during the night. And Polly and Susie would both need to be at their best on the

morrow if Jack's plans were to be carried out.

What was to be done ? Nellie Wright seemed to have no control over the invalid.

It was after Jack had dined that Polly went to him and suggested timidly that she should ask old Clinker Prettyman, who was in the bar, to watch through the night with Nellie.

" If any one can cast the devil out of her, he can, sir," said Polly. " And he's a good old man. Never a word have I heard against him. He doesn't use any spells or anything. He just prays. Lor' ! How he does pray ! That does ye good to hear him ! "

Old Clinker was a well-known character for miles round. He had the reputation of being able to outwit or outspell any of those whom rustic superstition credited with evil powers. And that he was virtuous and charitable all the poor of the adjacent marshlands could vouch. Jack had met him years ago, and been greatly struck with the peaceful, kindly look in his extraordinary eyes. These eyes were violet, their pupils almost pear-shaped, and the violet pupils contracted and expanded in moments of intense emotional fervour in a very singular manner.

Jack, a son of Daneshire, whose religious fervour had been enormously developed by his experience

in the trenches, did not regard Polly's suggestion with the ridicule with which a man-about-town would have considered it. He hesitated, it is true. But finally he gave his consent that an experiment should be tried: that old Clinker should be introduced into Mary's room in the presence of Polly and Nellie Wright and that the effect of his advent should be observed.

The old man came slowly upstairs. He was over seventy, but as wiry as an otter.

"I ha' heard of that heathen witch man at the Hall before," he said. "And I ha' tackled him before. I can't say I beat him out and out, 'cos I didn't. But I was almost as strong as him. I'll promise ye this, master," he said to Jack. "She won't get worse while I'm with her. I won't promise to lift the spell altogether. That only the Master can do."

"You won't play any hanky-panky tricks?" asked Jack nervously.

Old Clinker turned round on him in savage indignation.

"I have no dealin's with such," he said. "My faith is in God and His Son. And I reckon if the maid's faith in Them had been as firm as mine, she'd never have come to this pass."

Jack was more abashed than he had been for some

time. Clinker was an unusual character. A man whose enormous magnetism did not appear till he was roused. But when he was uplifted with an impulse to declare the faith which he held so firmly he radiated power. There have been many cases of rough, uncultivated men possessing this wonderful force, of whom it is sufficient to mention John Bunyan and, perhaps, Spurgeon. The doubters cannot explain it. To believers it is merely a manifestation of the power of the Divine.

Soon after ten o'clock Mary and Susie went to take their rest to prepare them for the hard day which it seemed likely they might have to undergo on the morrow.

Nellie Wright and old Clinker were left with Mary.

Mary showed no dislike to the presence of the old man. Indeed, she seemed rather to take comfort from it. She rested better since he had come. And when Polly stole in before retiring she found the hypnotized girl in a quiet sleep.

It was not till close on midnight that she awoke. Nellie was asleep in her chair. But fortunately old Clinker was used to watching during the hours of the night, and he observed the change in the girl's eyes as soon as she opened them.

For a moment she sat up as if listening to some distant call. Then she began to get out of the bed,

Her movements were stilted, unnatural, marionette-like, as though they were caused by some intelligence other than her own.

Clinker at once woke Nellie, and the girl laid her hand on Mary, and endeavoured to persuade her again to lie down and rest.

Mary showed no sign that she felt the hand laid upon her. She moved from the bed, and, clad in Polly's night raiment as she was, she proceeded straight towards the door.

Nellie flung herself in front of her and threw her arms around her.

But Mary struggled violently. Yet it was not a struggle as against some recognized force, but a struggle against some unknown thing which obstructed her. She spoke no word, but ever strove to free herself to gain egress from the chamber.

Then old Clinker acted. He thrust Nellie aside, and taking one of Mary's hands in his he sank on his knees and bowed his head.

The words upon his reverend and reverent lips were too sacred to be written in a chronicle like this. The old man's face burned with a fever of uplifted soul, of determined faith. He prayed to the Divinity Whom he worshipped so devoutly to save this girl from the evil power which obsessed her.

From the first Mary's struggles grew less, but it

was not for a minute, or perhaps two, that her face resumed its calmness, and she was entirely passive in the hands of those who guarded her.

Nellie led her back to bed, and " tucked her up " comfortably.

Old Clinker still remained on his knees, his wrinkled work-worn hands covering his face, his whole lean, tired body shaken with the tremendous force of his appeal.

For fully fifteen minutes the old man knelt there, with the wondering and reverential eyes of Nellie turning to him every now and again.

By then Mary had sunk into a profound sleep. The danger was over.

Clinker rose from his knees and the sweat stood out upon his fleshless forehead as though he had been mowing a marsh on a sunny August day. His limbs, his poor old weary limbs, were tottering and shaking beneath him. He stumbled to a chair and seated himself, again hiding his face in his hands.

Nellie left him undisturbed for a few minutes. Then she rose and went over to him. " May I get you something, Mr. Prettyman ? " she asked. " Polly put brandy, whisky, and rum outside the door if you should feel to want it."

The old man made no answer, but his wizened

wiry frame shook convulsively in the reaction from the strain of his wrestle, as he believed it, with evil powers.

Nellie, after a glance at the bed to see that her patient was sleeping soundly, withdrew from the room. She knew the tastes of most of the old marshmen, and she returned with a beaker of the splendid old ship's rum which old Peter's father had stocked from a West Indian vessel driven into Herringhaven nearly a hundred years ago. It was soft as cream and ardent as fire.

She held the glass to the old man's lips, and he sipped, and felt the generous spirit flow through his veins. His tremors ceased and he took the glass in his hands and drank again.

"Thank you, my girl," he said to Nellie. "I'm getting old and ha' lost my vigour now. But, please God and our Master, she will be safe now till morning light. I can do no more. So long as that devil at the Hall lives I cannot wholly release the spell. Why our Lord suffers it to be, I know not. But I know that He will save her. She will come to no harm. Only be careful. Let not evil enter your thoughts or the thoughts of any one about her. Pray to the Lord of all to save her, and when she's got well away maybe the spell will lift. Ah! Twenty years ago I might have had the strength

to do it. But I'm old, old! And I can't wrestle as I used to."

The old man drank off the rest of the stimulant, and leant back in his chair, an expression of triumphant faith glowing in his weird-shaped eyes.

His eyes closed. But before he sank to slumber he said, "If she get troubled again, wake me up, my dear. I fare to want sleep. I'm old, I'm old!"

And with that he sank into an easy repose.

Nellie sat by the bedside till she heard Polly's knock at the door soon after first dawn. And throughout her later watch Mary had rested quietly.

When Bob Mallett returned from visiting Sam Buttle on the *Belvedere*, and informing him of the arrangements which had been made for the morrow, he noticed a tall, lanky, lithe man, who stooped as he slunk swiftly along, and who seemed to be following him.

Bob was a stalwart young fellow, and handy with the gloves. He had no fear of this curious bent shadow. But he wondered why it was lurking about him. He watched it as he strode briskl up past the church, and saw it fade away into the darkness of the secluded corners of the market-place.

He did not think it worth while to report this to his young master. But when he had informed

Jack that Sam was advised of what was intended and would be all ready, he retired to his own room, still wondering why on earth any one should think it worth while to shadow him.

And Fred Farman, having made certain inquiries in the little town and seen Bob enter the inn, stole off at express speed towards Smeltby Hall.

CHAPTER XVIII

PURCHASE AND THE PRINCESS

BOILING with rage, Clunes Purchase whirled into Smeltby some two hours after Jack and his party had brought up safely at the *King's Head*, St. Mary's on the Fen.

The old servants at the lonely house had been so effectually frightened by the rescuing party that they did not try to release their employer from his bonds for a good hour after the departure of the Rolls-Royce. They wished to be on the safe side. Moreover, they had no love for their employer. Purchase's mean parsimony and his brutal indifference to the feelings of those whom he considered to be below him in station invariably alienated both respect and affection from him.

And when he was unbound, and had satiated his fury by an outburst of foul language on the old folk who untied him, he found that one of the rescuing party—it was Bob—had taken care to cut

the tyres of his motor-bicycle, so that it took him a long time to repair them for the road.

He dismounted, spluttering with rage, at the door of Smeltby Hall, and the first person he met was Gunga Ram.

"You old fool!" cried Purchase. "A nice mess you've made of it! You put a spell on any one! Pah! I was a fool to put any trust in you!"

The Yogi made no reply. But he drew himself up, and looked at the vulgar half-caste with so serene and infinite a contempt that it even penetrated Purchase's thick hide. Without further noticing the insult to which he had been subjected, Shri Gunga passed on his way, and his look was enough to prevent the half-caste from following him and from continuing his insults.

It may be that this rash rudeness of Purchase prevented Gunga Ram from putting forth all his powers to subjugate Mary Palmer that night. What happened during a few minutes on the following day is in favour of this supposition. But in dealing with the mysterious force exercised by the Yogi all is pure conjecture to Western minds. It is only possible to narrate the facts as they occurred so far as it has been possible to ascertain their nature from the evidence at hand.

Purchase stormed on into the house, and meeting

Emma, the maid, demanded of her roughly the whereabouts of the Princess.

Emma, who loathed the half-caste and was suddenly radiant with hope that Mary had escaped him, smirked, and said, "My mistress is lyin' down, sir. She can't be disturbed."

"But she must be," shouted Purchase. "I must see her at once. Things have gone wrong——" Then he had sufficient discretion to pull himself up in spite of his rage. It was not for him to mention the catastrophe which had fallen on the conspiracy to a waiting-maid who had already refused with scorn the advances he had politely made to win her favour.

Emma tossed her head.

"If you order me to disturb her, sir," she said, "I will."

"Then—I do order you," shouted Purchase. "I must see her at once."

He was intensely worried. He knew he had been a fool to annoy the Yogi. But in his state of mind he had been unable to restrain his temper. And he knew that if the Princess heard of his rudeness to the Adept she would be both scornful and angry.

He did not suspect that Jack Ranworth had brought Mary to St. Mary's. He thought that she had been whirled miles away on the powerful car,

It was necessary for him to have a consultation with the Princess as to what would be the best course to pursue. Already it seemed too late to retrieve the position. But there was always hope when there were powers such as the Yogi's at the disposal of the conspirators. Unfortunately he had affronted the holy man of the East and knew that it would need all the persuasion of the Princess to undo what a moment's intemperate rage had done.

Emma tripped off on being ordered to inform her mistress that Purchase demanded to see her without delay.

"Please God," said the waiting-maid, "they'll be done. Please God Miss Mary will get out of their clutches. If she does, no longer will I stay in this house! It's a temple of the devil, I call it!"

Emma went off to tell the Princess of her importunate caller, while Purchase made his way to the drawing-room with as much coolness as if he were in his own house.

He had not to wait long. The Princess guessed at once that something had gone wrong with the conspiracy, and she was frightened. She had thought that, had she succeeded in getting Mary compromised with Purchase, the girl would have consented to the marriage and all would have been well. But if she had escaped from the snare set

for her she might get away and communicate with her grandfather. And the Princess still held the General in wholesome dread, remembering his stern inflexibility when she had last seen him. She had promised to be kind to Mary, to be a real mother to her. And she knew that she had broken her promise in such a way that she would obtain no forgiveness from her husband if he were once advised of it. She knew what it had cost the old gentleman to leave his granddaughter in her care. And she remembered the promises and oaths with which he had tried to bind her down before he consented to let her be Mary's guardian. But for that treasure, the existence of which she believed to be only known to Purchase, and to her through Purchase, she would never have encouraged the half-caste. But when Purchase told her of the treasure he had heard of from his father, the merchant in Madras, and offered to share it with her if she succeeded in persuading Mary to take him for her husband, she had been tempted by her love of wealth to fall in with the scoundrel's schemes. That the General knew of this wealth, hoarded up by Colonel Palmer and entrusted by him to Clunes Purchase's father—a true-bred Hindu (for his mother gave the half-caste the white strain)—she did not believe. He had never mentioned it to her,

and she did not suspect that he kept a secret for what he considered to be very good reasons.

She rose from the divan on which she was reposing at once; flung her white robes and veil about her and descended to the drawing-room.

As she passed the corridor leading to the apartments allotted to her unhappy insane sons, she shuddered at the hideous noise which proceeded from it.

She would have prayed. But amongst all the deities of Buddhist belief there was not one to whom her prayers seemed to be likely to appeal, save the Lord Siddartha himself. And, like most Buddhist women, she was not accustomed to pray to that beautiful shadow; for, with strange perversity, around the personality of the gentle and unselfish Buddha had been grouped a number of blood-thirsty and revolting sub-deities, to whom she, and her fellow co-religionists, were wont to sacrifice and pray rather than to the Hero of the Vedas.

She shuddered miserably as she stepped with her characteristic majesty into the drawing-room.

Clunes Purchase was travel and strife-stained. He made a sorry figure as he raised his sore and weary limbs from the soft Eastern couch on which he had sunk.

"She's got away, Princess," he said. "That—

that infernal fellow who has been talking to her over the wall did it. He and a lot of other ruffians managed to trace us, and they overcame me by superior force? How the deuce was I to imagine that any one would be on our track so soon?"

"Where is she?" asked the Princess very anxiously.

"The Lord knows," replied Purchase. "I was nearly killed; they tied me up, and went off in a car with her. There must have been half a dozen of them, confound them! It was some time after they got away with her that the old people I had in the house came and untied me. They had been terrified almost out of their lives by the brutes!"

"But she?" asked the Princess eagerly. "She? Did she show any resistance? Did she oppose you?"

"No," replied Purchase, honestly for a wonder. "I cannot say she did. She seemed half asleep all the time. She was entirely passive. If it had not been for those swine, I should have brought it off all right."

"That's good," exclaimed the Princess, her face, beneath its white veil, smoothing its lines of terror and anxiety. "Then she is still under the influence of Shri Gunga. If so, she may come back of her own accord. At all events Shri Gunga will be able to influence her."

Had Purchase had the wisdom of the serpent, as he had the venom, he would have informed the Princess that he had affronted the Yogi. But he dared not do this. He merely assumed an air of gratification and said, " That's all right, then, if only we can find her."

" Have you sent to St. Mary's to ask when their car passed through, or rather if it did pass through ? My own idea is that they will try to get her to Odinton and send for her grandfather. If so, through St. Mary's would be the nearest way. We ought to know that."

So it happened that Fred Farman was ordered to make stealthy inquiries at St. Mary's, inquiries which were to put the conspirators on the right track.

" I will ask Shri Gunga if he can tell us where she is," said the Princess.

Purchase said nothing. If the Yogi would forget the rudeness offered him and obey the wishes of the Princess, so much the better. But he doubted it. He had caught a glance from those placid, beautiful and unwinking eyes which had sent a thrill of fear through him, and he believed that although time might soften the resentment of the Adept he would not assist in the conspiracy that night.

The Princess struck her gong, and presently when

Emma entered, bade the maid request the Yogi to come to her.

Emma was gone but a very few minutes when she returned and said that "Mr. Gunga Ram had gone to his room and had given strict orders that he was not to be disturbed. Not even was there to be a knock at his door."

Purchase would have been inclined to ignore this order. But the Princess dared not do so. She knew the temper and the powers of this priest of Buddha, and though she had a certain amount of influence over him she dared not give directions for so clear an injunction of his to be ignored. Purchase was a believer in no form of religion. The Princess worshipped Buddha and his ministers, and was so far a better woman than Purchase was a man. For it is better to worship so beautiful a symbol of divinity as Buddha than to worship nothing except oneself.

"We must wait till morning," said the Princess, after a pause, during which Emma stood primly, at the regulation pose of "attention" for servant-maids. Then she added, "We must wait till to-morrow. I dare not interrupt him now. I dare not."

Purchase sniggered nastily. "Why not? I'd soon rout the old chap out," he said.

The Princess held up one white-clad arm as though to ward off a danger. "You do not know," she said. "You do not know. You have our blood in you, but you are tainted with the blood of the West. Go. Learn what you can of the car in which Mary was taken away from you. And give me all the information you can obtain as soon as possible. And never, ah! never again dare to laugh at the Gods of Hind or their servants in my presence. You know not what dangers you run—you, who have some of the blood of Hind in your veins."

She spoke so impressively that the callous scoundrel was moved, alarmed. He slunk out of the woman's presence like a dog threatened by a whip. But as soon as he was outside in the corridor he reassumed his jaunty bearing. "Hang it!" he said. "I'll soon find out. And God help 'em if I can get at 'em. I'll get the Princess to let me take the two keepers with me on the hunt. They are used to dealing with obstruction! Ha! Ha! And I'll see the Princess's car is in order. It ought to be good enough, a 40 h.p. Darracq. But what's the use, till I know where they went!"

When Fred Farman brought up the news that from what he had heard in St. Mary's it seemed certain that Mary and the party of rescuers were

spending the night at the *King's Head*, Purchase cursed vigorously from sheer delight. He had only one way of expressing great emotion, whether pleasurable or the reverse, and that was by means of oaths. He laid his plans and gave Fred Farman his orders.

The Princess had not yet retired for the night, and after Fred had been again dispatched to keep watch on the *King's Head*, she and Purchase had another consultation. The Yogi still remained impenetrable, in his private suite of apartments. But Purchase flattered himself he could do without mystic assistance now.

Both he and the Princess believed that they had provided against every contingency when they closed their conversation.

Purchase sank to sleep, a little heavy with the quantity of stimulant he had taken, feeling that there was no hurry. He would recover Mary on the morrow with the aid of the Princess, the girl's legal guardian. And then——!

CHAPTER XIX

THE ROLLS-ROYCE STARTS

AT the first glimpse of first dawn of the following morning Nellie Wright awoke old Clinker and asked him to keep guard over Mary while she went to wake Polly. But before she reached the door she heard a hand upon its handle, and Polly entered ; her eyes filmed with sleep, but otherwise alert and ready for action.

" How has she been ? " asked Polly. " Any more trouble ? "

Nellie gave a look of devout admiration at old Clinker. " Not since old Clinker went on his knees and wrestled," she said. " She's laid as quiet as quiet ever since then."

Polly nodded. " I'll stay here while you run and wake Master Jack and Bob Mallett," she said. " Clinker," she continued, speaking to the old man who was now on his feet and brisk and wide awake as a boy of eighteen, " you need not remain any longer. But stay in the kitchen till I come down. You must want your breakfast."

"Well," said the old man, "I ginerally enjoy my brekkust. But this will be what we call a dew snack, Polly. That's early for brekkust. Howsomedever, it don't fare to matter what ye call it so long as it taste good."

He gave a look at Mary, still sleeping peacefully, her bosom rising and falling steadily, her eyes closed. "Do ye think she'll be all right without me now?" he asked.

"Oh yes," cried ~~Mary~~ Polly, brave now that a new day had dawned. "But we shall never be able to make it up to ye, Clinker. What we should ha' done without ye there is no telling."

"Then," said Clinker, settling down on his knees with the deliberation of an old man, "let's you and me give thanks where 'tis due. As for her, poor dear, she ain't in a fit state for that yet. But I do hope that afore sunset she'll be free o' the spell. I'd like to ha' been with her throughout the day. But I can't leave my level with all the sheep and young things on it. Howsomedever. Do you mind and tell you the young master, that if she come over queer again there's only one place where help can come from. Tell him he may be as proud and proud as he like. But he must beseech the Lord to help, for nowhere else is help to be had in rum funny cases like this."

The old man clasped his wizened, toil-worn hands, and, in a low voice, poured forth a stream of passionate supplication to the Region whence cometh help. To old-fashioned rustics such as Clinker there is no irreverence in approaching the throne of the God in Whom they fervently believe even at such times as to the ordinary people of the world might seem unsuited. Clinker had often been heard to say that the Lord did not know the difference between one minute and another and that he reckoned one was as good as another to worship. The stalwart faith of the old Ironside blood may be a little discomfiting at times to those who have it not. But it is not a thing for ridicule, and it imparts a suggestion of power to its owner which cannot but influence any one whose heart and brain are not calloused by self-conceit.

Polly began to whimper. She was a good girl enough, but the strenuous and soulful piety of the old man stirred her emotions.

"I will, oh! I will!" she sobbed in response to a fervent appeal from the old man that all men and women should trust in the Lord and worship Him.

When Clinker had finished his supplication he straightened his stiff old joints, and, laying his hand for a moment on the head of the still kneeling Polly, he hobbled out of the room.

Mary lay apparently in a sweet and dreamless sleep. It was time to wake her.

Polly touched her forehead gently. "Wake up, Miss Mary," she said. "We're makin' an early start this morning."

Mary's eyes opened. At first they seemed dazed, and she looked about her as if she had no knowledge of where she was or how she came there—which was probably the fact.

But she soon yielded to the persuasions of Polly. "You are to get up, miss, and go to meet your grandfather," said Polly, assuming rather more than she was justified in assuming for the purpose of setting Mary's mind at ease.

However, there did not appear to be any reluctance in Mary to do as she was told. She still showed no signs of individuality, no inclination, nor indeed ability, to act as her own mind dictated.

She rose from bed and permitted Polly to attire her for the day and to lead her to a little private sitting-room on the same floor where breakfast was prepared.

Outside in the yard Bob Mallett was talking with Jack Ranworth. The Rolls-Royce stood ready, well lubricated, her tank full of petrol, and one of the automatics in the case in the door-panel against the driver's seat.

Alongside the aristocratic car stood the butcher's little runabout which, as we know, Jack had hired more than once for the use of Bob Mallett.

As the two men were talking, Susie Platt came out and Jack went to her.

"You are sure you don't mind, Susie," said Jack, calling her by her Christian name in the way a young squire had towards a daughter of the cottages. "You know there may be some unpleasantness."

"Captain Ranworth," said Susie very earnestly, "I don't care what I do if I can make that man pay. Times and times again he's sworn he loved me and would make me his wife. Lucky for me I didn't take it all in. But he did make me fond of him for a time. That's all."

"Thank God," said Jack, who had been a little disturbed in his mind about Susie, and he heard what she said with a great deal of relief.

Purchase had not succeeded in being the villain he had feared. But he did not attribute this to any virtue on the part of the man, and in this he was right, as Susie could have told him.

"The infernal swine!" he said, enraged at the notion that such a blackguard should have dared to cast his eyes on his beloved Mary, and to carry her off to that lonely house.

"When I saw him motorin' through the village with Miss Mary yesterday I'd had enow of it," continued Susie, "and now I've heard where he took her that settles it. As my brother Fred in London says, 'that puts the lid on.'"

"You'll only have to sit still and keep your veil on, you know," said Jack. "Whether you'll see him to-day or not, I can't tell. I fancy not."

"If I do he'll hear somethin'," said the valiant Susie. "I'll learn him to put the grin on to me! You wait till my father gets his hands on him! But there! I reckon I better hadn't tell father too much," she added, with a rather rueful smile. "He might think I deserved strap as well as him. And he hain't got too light a hand for dumplin's, hain't father."

"Very well," said Jack a little absent-mindedly. He rather wished now that he had made one modification of his plan so that Mary would have had a chaperon throughout the day. But it was too late to alter the arrangements. And, after all, it would not matter. He was resolved to make Mary his wife, and he believed that when she recovered from the condition which still alarmed him she would consent to take him for her husband willingly.

"Look a there," whispered Susie, nodding out towards the market-place.

Jack looked and saw the lean, ungainly figure of Fred Farman slouching along. Fred had not been told to keep himself hidden, and as he was not poaching on his own accord he saw no reason why he should not endeavour to view a little of what was going on, provided he did the work entrusted to him faithfully.

"That's Fred Farman," said Susie. "He's one o' Clunes's men."

"Ah," said Jack, with a smile, "is he? So much the better. Let him have a good look at you in those clothes, will you?"

So Susie strolled out into the market-place, which was still empty and quiet with that exquisite peace of early morning.

Fred, seeing the girl, fancied that she had come out to question him, and he dodged round the corner of the inn.

Susie came back laughing.

Presently Jack told her she had better go in, get her breakfast and make ready for the day's adventure. He himself made his way to his private room and sat down to a noble tench and some "pork cheese" as good as Canterbury brawn.

The sun had hardly sent his first glimmer above

the tops of the houses to the east when what appeared to be the figure of Mary Palmer came out from the inn, clad in motor-coat and hat, with her face hidden by a motor-veil

As soon as this happened, Bob Mallett emerged from the kitchen entrance wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

He helped the girl into the Rolls-Royce, Jack started the engine, while Bob got into the driver's seat, and presently the great car moved out of the yard, swung round to the left, and sped off silently towards the marshes. On the way to Odinton it seemed likely.

Fred saw the car pass, and recognized the hat and coat. At once he started to run towards Smeltby at the top of his speed.

In five minutes the Smeltby car, which had been waiting in a street near by, started in pursuit. In it were seated the Princess, Clunes Purchase, and Tom Hale, one of the keepers of the lunatics.

"Wait till we get out into the country," said Purchase, who was driving. "I don't know what car they've got, but she'll have to be a good 'un to keep ahead of us."

CHAPTER XX

THE THREE-CARD TRICK

MOVED by some intuitive caution, Purchase, when he drove off after receiving Fred Farman's report, had ordered the latter to return to the *King's Head* and still watch the entrance. Why the half-caste did so he could not have explained, any more than he could explain various matters which baffled him during that eventful morning.

As he sheered round the last corner of St. Mary's and began to open the throttle as the country roads showed clear before him, he said to the Princess, "I don't know why, but I fancied he'd have tried to get away by water."

In his anxiety he had forgotten to ask Fred who was driving the Rolls-Royce. Had he known that it was Bob Mallett, and not Captain Ranworth, he might have been still more uneasy in his mind. As it was he drove on, convinced that Jack had gone off with Mary in the car with the intention of taking

her to Odinton, there probably to await the coming of General Blunderfield.

For if Mary did not know where her grandfather was, the Princess knew well enough that he was at the great camp at Goddelwich, which is only about an hour and twenty minutes' run from Odinton, being the capital town of South Daneshire, as old Odinton is of North.

"Well," continued Purchase, after a pause, "if they are bound for Odinton, they'll have to go over Duckingham Bridge, and I can tell my pal there to stop any boat that tries to go under. They must go under the bridge if they go in that hydroplane thing I've heard of."

"But," said the Princess, "they can't go both by road and water. And we know they have gone by road."

Purchase grunted. He wished he had gone down himself to watch, but he thought that might have made his enemy more careful, and he was also uncertain as to Mary's condition. If she was quite recovered, she and Jack might be able to make it uncomfortable for him on a charge of kidnapping. Purchase was wise enough in the laws of finance, but knew little of the criminal laws of England.

"I wish you had not upset Shri Gunga," said the Princess.

Purchase had not told her that he had insulted the Yogi, but before she retired to sleep on the previous evening the Princess had sent another very urgent message to the Yogi and received the reply that he would not leave his room until Purchase had left the house. On this the Princess had gone up to his apartments and after humbling herself in the dust had a short interview with him. She had been unable to shake his determination as to meeting Purchase. But she extorted a promise that he would endeavour to bring his hypnotic powers to bear on Mary so as to cause her to struggle to return to the Hall.

"But," the Yogi had said, "there is a greater power fighting against me. Here, in this Western land, my gods and my powers have not the strength that they have in the country of Hind."

Gunga Ram was, as has been said, a philosopher, and, in many ways, a good man. He was a true priest of Buddha. But he realised that there was a greater than Buddha, at all events in the West. I write this with all reverence, in order to put the Yogi's views before my readers. And I would beg them to remember that for a Buddhist priest to appreciate what he would call the power of Krishna marks that Buddhist priest as some one entirely different from the illiterate fanatical Yogis who form

the majority of the priests of the Lord Siddartha.

Purchase believed only in the material, though he had more than once been reluctantly compelled to admit that Gunga Ram could do things which he could not explain. Purchase classed all these mysteries under the head of what he called Mesmerism, and merely regarded them as effects of a cause not yet fully understood by the Western civilization.

"Oh well," said Purchase in reply to the Princess, "he should not have messed the whole thing up."

The Princess was about to retaliate. But she saw the futility of doing so. After all, her great aim now was to regain the legal control of Mary. And to do that she must rely on Purchase and her car.

Fred Farman slunk swiftly back towards the market-place and took up his stand where he could see the archway of the *King's Head* with little chance of himself being seen. He had received orders that if he thought it necessary he was to summon Bill Hansell, the other keeper at the Hall, to assist. In giving these orders neither the Princess nor Purchase recollected that if Bill were taken from the Hall the lunatics would be left without a keeper and that Shri Gunga would then be the only man in the house save the unfortunate madmen.

Purchase owned a powerful motor-boat which lay

at St. Mary's Staith and which Fred could manage. As he had really believed that Jack would probably endeavour to get Mary away by water so as to deceive the watchers on land, he had warned Fred that if he saw the hydroplane sail with a woman in it he was to give chase, taking Bill Hansell as assistant. He believed that he had taken every possible precaution.

But men of his class often believe that without sufficient cause.

About an hour after the departure of the Rolls-Royce, Fred Farman was astonished to see Jack drive out the butcher's little runabout, with a veiled lady by his side whom he could not distinguish from her who had already gone in the Rolls-Royce. Were there, then, two Marys? And which of them should he have watched? He saw Jack turn the little car down towards the river, and at once suspected that the former evasion was a decoy. He knew that Purchase had always believed that Jack would try to get Mary away by water. He did not waste time by going to the river, but at once ran up to Smeltby Hall to fetch Bill Hansell. If Jack were to attempt to get away on the hydroplane, it would take Fred all his time to attend to the engines of Purchase's motor-boat if he were to stand the least chance of keeping the chase in sight, to say

nothing of coming up with her. Moreover, Fred was not valiant. He preferred to attack a man like the Daneshire hero, Captain Ranworth, with a preponderance of force on his side. He refused to listen to any expostulation of the one keeper who was left to guard the lunatics. "Let 'em hang 'emselves if they want to," said Fred. "If the guv'nor doesn't get back Miss Mary, he won't listen to any excuses. Leave 'em here. Lock 'em in if you like. But come with me at once. There is not a moment to lose."

Bill Hansell, a huge, slow-minded man, was overborne by the fierce earnestness of the poacher. But even Fred was unable to make the great lump of human flesh move with any celerity. When at last the two men arrived at the staith by the bridge the hydroplane was well away, and could only be seen through the binoculars which Purchase had left with Fred, and from the top of a cutter's mast.

"After 'em," cried Fred. "After 'em. There's a stiff breeze blowing and that catch them sideways. I reckon we may keep 'em in sight till we get to Duckingham Bridge, and there the guv'nor has a friend who will have a word to say."

Bill Hansell tumbled clumsily into the motor-boat. Fred had already filled the petrol tank. He started the engine and in a very few minutes was

foaming down the Saelig in hot pursuit of the hydroplane.

This frantic start was viewed by Jack, who stood smiling in the boathouse he had hired by the riverside. As soon as the motor-boat was round the point of the first reach Jack motored quietly up back to the *King's Head*. Old Peter Young was now down and said that he had heard nothing from upstairs, so that he presumed that Nellie was having no trouble with her charge.

Old Peter was chuckling with delight. "Lor', Master Jack," he said, "you've done 'em proper. You've wholly puzzled them. What with Bob Mallett a-goin' off with one, and Sam Buttle with another, and you gettin' ready to go off with a third, they won't know which is which. It's for all the world like the three-card trick. Find the lady! He! he! he! But I reckon that'll take 'em all their time. Now before you make a start of it do you get a pint o' my own special home-brewed into ye! That'll put heart into ye, and there's a tidy fresh breeze blowin'. Are ye sure you can handle the *Belvedere* by yourself? If not, ye know there is a nephew of Sam Buttle's in the boathouse by the bridge coming on to be as good as his uncle. He'd go with ye to handle the jib sheets, and you can trust him as you can me."

Jack thought for a moment. Had Mary been herself, he would not have hesitated to undertake the charge of the cutter alone. But he remembered that the girl might want care during the cruise. It would be well to have another hand on whom he could rely.

"That's a good notion, Peter," he said. "Send down to him and tell him to get aboard the cutter, get her main's'l up and her jib ready to hoist. He'd better bend the second main's'l and No. 2 jib, as I think the wind will freshen as the sun rises. Have you got any one to send?"

"My Joe will go," said the old man. "Lord, what excitement for St. Mary's. What a song there will be about it! I do hope and pray, Master Jack, as you'll get the young lady safe out of the hands of those hell hounds! She never ought to have been allowed to be shut up there."

Jack assented, and expressed his willingness to drink that tankard of ale. He had seen that a hamper of country delicacies, with some of old Peter's seventy port decanted, and a bottle of old Banff whisky, could be sent down to the cutter. It was time to warn Nellie to prepare Mary for the trip.

Of course my readers will have understood that Polly Young had gone off as a decoy with Bob Mallett, and that Susie Platt had performed the same

office in going with Sam Buttle aboard the *Dragon-fly*. The only cause for anxiety was lest some accident might enable the party from Smeltby to come up with the Rolls-Royce and see through the deception in time to enable them to come back and interfere with Jack's cruise in the cutter. He would not have to pass under Duckingham Bridge. It was his intention to go by the canal from the Saelig to the Thorwater, leaving Duckingham Bridge half a mile to his starboard side where the canal branched off from the Saelig. If his directions were obeyed, the picket on the bridge would be too busy in attending to Sam and Susie to pay any attention to the cutter, which would not pass within half a mile. He believed that the appearance of Mary was unknown to any one at the picket, and Susie had her orders. She was not to speak but to feign lassitude. She was dainty enough to be a lady, and she would probably be able to deceive Purchase's friend at the bridge long enough to enable Jack to sail up to the Red House at Quantley on the Thorwater, where he expected to meet his father in another fast car.

In less than half-an-hour from his return from the river Nellie came downstairs, supporting Mary Palmer, who still seemed very weak and hardly in possession of her faculties. But she was quiet enough and entirely passive.

"Don't you think, sir," said Nellie, "that you could find room for me? I don't like the idea of the young lady being without a woman to help her in case she's taken queer again. Ain't there room aboard?"

"What an ass I was not to think of it!" cried Jack, remembering that he had wished for a chaperon. "Of course you must come, Nellie. I'll tell old Peter at once."

Mary sank into an armchair while Jack went in search of the landlord. Old Peter hummed and ha'd for a moment. "That's a nice thing you're doing, Master Jack," said he. "Why, you'll only leave me the cook and old Mother Bee in the house!" But though the old man made this protest, his ventral gurgles showed that he was chuckling at his own protest. Nellie ran up and "made herself ready," and very soon Mary was helped into the little runabout with Nellie beside her. Jack squeezed into the driver's seat, and the trio began to motor gently down the hill towards the river.

"Good," said Jack, as he swung past the last houses which hid the river from his view.

The *Belvedere* was lying head to wind, her bowsprit reaching over the land, a gang plank stretching from land to her deck. The jib was ready on the forecastle, and a brisk youth of nineteen or

twenty was busy passing the sheets through the jib blocks.

It was not yet seven o'clock, so early had Jack and his assistants started work. But for one man in the boatyard there was no one near the cutter except those who were to sail on her.

Nellie sprang from the car, and Jack leapt out over the door on his side. Mary still sat passive, apparently unable to move, without any independent volition, till Jack took her arm and spoke to her.

"You must come aboard now, please, Miss Palmer," he said, looking nervously at her face, which was, like the faces of Polly and Susie, shrouded by a thick motor veil.

Mary seemed stirred by his voice. With a swift movement she thrust her veil aside, and her lovely eyes turned full on Jack's with more intelligence in them than had been evident there since her rescue from the lonely house.

"Yes, please," she said.

She sprang from the car with something of her usual agility, and made no difficulty in crossing the gang plank to the deck of the yacht, guided by Jack's protecting hand.

Nellie followed, bearing such wraps as had not already been put aboard.

"For the first reach or two you'd better keep in the cabin," said Jack. "I believe we have put them all off the scent, but we cannot be too careful. For all I know, the Princess may have communicated with the police, and though I would not give her up to forty policemen we want to get under way with as little bother as possible."

"Course you do," agreed Nellie. "Come down, my dear young lady," she said to Mary offering to lead her charge into the cosy little cabin.

But Mary hung back and looked at Jack. She moved towards him and he saw that she wished him to conduct her under shelter. At the thought to which this gave rise Jack's heart gave a mighty bound. Even in her distressing condition, then, she relied on him. Ah! Let any of the vermin from Smeltby try to rob him of her before he had placed her safe in his father's or her grandfather's hands! He had his most powerful automatic and a repeating rifle aboard. He would risk imprisonment, anything, to save her from such a dreadful existence as that from which she had escaped by his help.

He led her to the cabin, seated her on one of the side seats, well covered with cushions, and told Nellie to watch her carefully. Mary seemed reluctant to let him go, but when he told her that

it was necessary for him to go into the stern-sheets to attend to the little craft, she made no protest, only her hand dwelt lingeringly on his sleeve, and she stroked his coat with a curious soft touch.

Jack strode into the stern-sheets, and at once became the brisk and competent yachtsman. His shoulder troubled him little now. He was so eager to get his beloved into a place of safety that for the moment he even forgot that poor old Kitch would be left in the *King's Head* stables to the care of the ostler until Bob could come over to fetch him.

"Up with your jib, Buttle," he said to the grinning youth, as he thrust the tiller hard to windward by his thigh. He reached out and caught hold of the weather jib sheet as the sail rose and filled aback. "Cast off," he cried, as the craft came round on her moorings. The youth cast loose the mooring rope and hauled it aboard. The yacht paid off. Jack eased the weather jib sheet and gathered in the lee, while young Buttle came clambering aft. "Loose the mainsheet," cried Jack. "We'll have no sheets fast in this breeze."

"Right you are, master," said the youth, delighted to find that he was to sail with a man who was no ignoramus at the game.

The main was eased out and Jack eased out the jib as the canvas took the wind, and presently the

cutter was roaring northward before a strong south-easterly breeze, the bow wave setting the rushes at the river side bowing and hissing with a music which all lovers of the Daneshire waters know so well.

"That's all right," said Jack. "Now if everything continues to go as well as it has gone hitherto, we're all right."

CHAPTER XXI

FOOLED

HAD Purchase known the make and horse power of the car he was pursuing, he might have been surprised to find that he came in sight of her within fifteen minutes after the chase began. It was close to the spot where the St. Mary's by-road leads into the main road from Odinton to Trawlhaven that he first saw her spinning across a marsh " dam " about half a mile ahead.

" There they go," he said to the Princess, speaking over his shoulder, for the lady was riding in the rear compartment of the Darracq. " Take these glasses and make sure it is your granddaughter."

The Princess, who had prudently consented to cover her usual white filmy raiment with a business-like fur coat, and to tie a motor veil over her head, reached out for the glasses and focussed them on the car ahead.

" I recognize the hat and coat," she said. " It must be she. Besides, who else could it be ? "

"But the man?" asked Purchase, anxiously. "Is the man Ranworth?"

"I can't tell," replied the Princess. "I have never seen Captain Ranworth. But he does not look to me like a gentleman. But I know that coat and hat. It must be Mary. Perhaps Captain Ranworth thought it better not to compromise himself too much."

The news that the driver of the car ahead did not look like a gentleman disturbed Purchase. He knew that no one could mistake Jack for other than a gentleman. What a fool he had been not to ask Fred Farman if he recognized the driver of the car. He felt that he had been foolish, but characteristically he vented his displeasure on a person other than himself. "Why on earth did not that idiot Fred Farman tell me if Ranworth was driving or not?" he grumbled. "Anyhow, we shall soon come up with them."

He pressed down the accelerator and the car shot ahead.

For a mile or two he ran on in cheerful anticipation of soon overhauling the Rolls-Royce. But he began to observe that he did not seem to get any nearer the "chase." However much he urged on the Darracq, she seemed unable to make up any way on the car ahead. And this was the stranger

because she must have overtaken the leading car at first or the latter would be miles ahead with the start it had obtained.

Still Purchase knew that many cars need to be warmed up before they get into their stride. No doubt the front car had started sulkily, as cars will, but now that she had gone a few miles, and her engine got warm, she was doing better.

"Why," said Purchase, as he again caught sight of the "chase," "they are not going along the Odinton Road, after all! Where the dickens can they be making for?"

Tom Hale spoke for the first time. "Captain Ranworth's place is at Chittenham, sir," he said. "Right up the Norwater. If he makes for that he'll either have to go through Herringhaven or fetch a long way round."

"Then we are bound to get them," said Purchase. "They can't go through Herringhaven at that pace, and there we can appeal to the police. If they go the long way round, they will give us more time to catch them."

The keeper, or warder, made no reply. But he thought that unless they gained on the other car considerably more than they had done for the last quarter of an hour it seemed likely to be a long chase.

It soon seemed certain that the Rolls-Royce was not to be taken through Herringhaven. She turned into a main road leading to the north-west, inland and upriver. Two or three pickets were passed, and at these Purchase was annoyed to find that he was pulled up and compelled to show his passes. These were in order and gave him almost unlimited discretion as to his route. He comforted himself by thinking that if he were stopped so must be the car ahead, so that the latter gained nothing by the military precautions. He regretted he had not endeavoured to put all the pickets on their guard. He had thought of trying to stretch his influence to that extent. But it was a difficult thing where so well known and so greatly admired a soldier as Jack Ranworth was concerned. He had naturally thought that Jack himself would drive the car. Perhaps it was he. Why on earth could he draw no nearer to the chase, however hardly he pressed the Darracq ?

The matter became serious. Hour after hour the Darracq fled along in the track of the Rolls-Royce.

Sometimes it gained a few hundred yards. But, apparently, only on sufferance, for as soon as it approached within a little over a quarter of a mile the leading car shot ahead and in a few minutes was farther distant than ever. Oh ! If only a tyre might

burst, or some accident happen to the engine of that infernal car !

And to irritate Purchase still further, the route followed by the leading car seemed to have no meaning in it. Indeed, sometimes Bob Mallett, chuckling to himself, drove round in a circle, but always so that the car behind could not intercept him by taking a short cut.

Purchase began to bite his lips and swear. For some time he had suspected that he was being played with, and this infuriated him.

" Get out the pistol, Tom," he said to his man when the two cars were racing along a wild lonely expanse of marsh far up the Norwater, nowhere near Odinton or any other place which seemed reasonable for its goal. " We'll have a try at the tyres."

Tom hesitated. He was afraid of the law, was Tom, and he had no wish to figure as the accomplice of a man accused of murder or manslaughter.

" Do as I tell you, man," cried Purchase. " Can you shoot ? "

" I can, but I ain't a-goin' to," said Tom. " I signed on to look after mad folk, not to go a-shootin' at people what never did me any harm."

" Well, can you drive a car, then ? " asked Purchase.

"Not at this pace. If I do try now I reckon you'll have to slow her down," said Tom, chuckling inwardly.

Purchase was disliked by all those whom he considered to be his inferiors in station. His manner was rough and brutal with them and he was under the impression that any man of Tom's class could be bought. Now Tom had become brutalized to a certain extent by the terribly wearing work of attending on full-grown men deprived of reason. But he had not lost his Daneshire spirit of independence, and both he and his mate, Bill Hansell, resented their treatment at the hands of the half-caste. They called him ugly names, and, though they were ready to obey the Princess in all things lawful, they were unwilling to stretch a point in favour of the brutal-mannered man whom they considered as "half a nigger."

Had it come to a fight, Tom would have backed his party. But he was not going to begin a fight, least of all to take pot-shots at a car which was fleeing from the wrath behind.

Purchase swore viciously as the Rolls-Royce again swung round a corner and shot along one of four cross-roads in a direction which seemed to be entirely irrational.

"By—— !" muttered Purchase, "I believe they

are playing with us." He used every means at his command to increase the pace of the Darracq, but still the Rolls-Royce kept her distance with apparent ease.

It was close on noon, and the cars had been hurtling along the roads for nearly six hours, when the Rolls-Royce at last settled to run in a straight direction. "If she goes on like this, she'll be at Goddelby," said Purchase. "Great Scott! We must have been over all North Daneshire and the greater part of South. What on earth is the fellow doing? It is enough to kill Miss Palmer," he shouted over his shoulder at the Princess.

The latter shrugged her shoulders. She would not have mourned if Mary did indeed die in the stress of the contest.

Now that Bob steered the car straight ahead very little time elapsed before she ran into the suburbs of the second largest city in Daneshire. Bob slowed down. He did not mean to be stopped by the police. Hitherto he had kept well away from places where he was likely to run across police. Now he eased his car to not more than fifteen miles an hour. Purchase was not so wise. He kept on at a pace which was preposterous for the streets of a town, and he had not got within a hundred yards of the leading car when he was halted by a

policeman, his name taken and a warning given.

This irritated him, but what annoyed him still more was to see that while he was checked the car ahead was slowed down to a crawl. It was evident that those in the Rolls-Royce no longer had any objection to being caught.

What could be the meaning of it ?

The Princess had for some time been too weary to speak. She was unused to leaving the precincts of her house, and when she did go out in her Darracq she rarely remained out for more than an hour. Moreover during that hour she did not permit the car to be driven at more than twenty miles an hour.

Purchase turned round to her. "Look again, please, Princess," he said. "They are not a hundred yards ahead."

But the Princess made no reply, and Purchase saw that she was overwrought, worn out with the strain of the chase.

"Hang it!" he said. "We ought to have brought some brandy with us! Why the deuce did not you think of it, Hale?"

"Not my work, sir," said Tom blandly.

"We must pull up at the *White Horse*," said Purchase, as the car approached that great hostelry. "Why, they are stopping there too!"

With his left hand he slipped his pistol in his pocket in case he should need it, while he continued to steer with his right hand.

And in a minute he had stopped his car just behind the Rolls-Royce. He sprang into the street and rushed at Bob Mallett, who was deliberately stretching his limbs on the pavement.

"You scoundrel!" cried Purchase, laying his hand on Bob's shoulder. "What do you——"

"Here," said Bob, giving the other a hefty push which sent him stumbling into the yard of the hotel. "Mind what you're sayin'. What do *you* want, anyway? Who are ye?"

Polly, who was inwardly convulsed with laughter and who had enjoyed the mad drive to the full, now unwound her motor veil from her hat and turned round to look at the two men, with a broad smile on her pretty face.

As Purchase recovered his balance and came back intent on again attacking Bob he caught sight of Polly's buxom form and rustic beauty.

He gasped. Although he had had his fears, he did not realize what he feared.

He advanced close to the car. "Who—who are you?"

"Here, that's enough of it," said Bob, again thrusting him aside. "You leave my gal alone,

We were not interfering with you! Aren't you satisfied with what you've got in your car? Be off, or you'll be sorry."

Purchase gasped. "But who are you?"

"If you come to that, who's yourself?" asked Bob. "Come, let's have no more of it. If you annoy this lady further, I'll give you in charge!"

Purchase stood aghast, dumb with the shock. Of course he realized that he had been played with. A glance at the car had shown him its make and the power of it. And he knew that it was Ranworth's car, unless Fred Farman had made a mistake. But then the Princess had recognized the hat and coat Polly was wearing! Of course it was Polly—Polly from the *King's Head*, St. Mary's. He knew her now! He had been fooled, made ridiculous!

"You shall pay for this," he hissed.

Bob told him not to be silly, which infuriated him more. He was about to give vent to his intemperate rage when he felt a touch on his shoulder. "The Princess wishes you to help her in," said Tom Hale. "She is very poorly."

"Help her in yourself," said Purchase. "Wait." He ran to the Princess. "Will you give this girl in charge for stealing the hat and coat you recognized?" he asked. "She's the barmaid from the *King's Head Inn*."

But the Princess was utterly sick of the whole adventure.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she managed to gasp. "You have shamed me enough. Go! I want to see you no more. I will hire a man to drive me home at a reasonable pace if Tom is afraid. Go! I wish I'd never deigned to fall in with your plot. You are a fool. Good mother Hind! What a fool you are!"

She took Tom's arm and, leaning heavily upon it, entered the hotel, demanding a private room and refreshments at once.

And Purchase, after standing for a minute or two grimacing and almost foaming at the mouth, started to run to the telegraph office which he saw a little way further along the street.

"I'll telegraph to Fred Farman," he said, "and to Duckingham. There is a chance yet."

CHAPTER XXII

THE CRUISE OF THE DRAGON-FLY

SAM BUTTLE and the *Dragon-fly* had a much longer start of Fred Farman and Purchase's fast motor boat than had Bob Mallett and the Rolls-Royce of Purchase in the Darracq. Indeed, before Sam reached the dyke that leads off from the Saelig to Loving Lake, the estuary at the back of Herringhaven, he began to think that he would reach Duckingham Bridge without being caught. And this was not in accordance with the plan. It was vital for Jack's scheme that all those who were likely to pursue him and Mary should be occupied when he took the cutter down the Saelig and through the Cut to the Thorwater. It is true that the water chase of Sam and Susie was not so important as the land chase by Purchase and the Princess. Owing to the association of Purchase and the officer in command of the Duckingham Bridge picket there was little doubt that the progress of the *Dragon-fly* would be stopped at the bridge. But even had

Mary been aboard the *Dragon-fly* her position was less precarious than if she had been captured by Purchase and her step-grandmother. For however Fred Farman and Bill Hansell might rage, neither of them had any authority over Mary, whereas there was no denying that the Princess was the girl's legal guardian. Had Mary been under the age of eighteen, the Princess might have been justified in prosecuting Jack Ranworth for abduction. But Mary was twenty, and it would be a very nice point if her legal guardian had even a right to interfere with her movements. But that point would only assist Jack's aims if Mary were her normal self. In the condition in which she was, Jack knew that it would be hard for him to succeed against the Princess's claim if once the latter again got hold of her step-granddaughter. That was why he was so anxious that he should get the girl under the care of his father, a well-known county magistrate, or of her own grandfather. He believed that, although the methods he had taken were complicated, they were the best that could be devised.

In the meantime Sam and Susie Platt were leaping down the river towards Duckingham.

When Sam reached Burgh St. Saelig Point, against the well-known *Burgh Arms Inn*, he stopped his engine. There was an upright mast in the gardens

of the inn with steps let into it on each side, similar to that at Great Yarmouth Yacht basin, which no doubt many of my readers have seen. He let the hydroplane slide to the staith against the inn and landed, after asking Susie if she would like a pick-me-up.

Susie consented to drink a glass of rum and new milk, and after recruiting his forces by the same admirable morning stimulant, Sam climbed the mast, put his prismatic binoculars (a present from Sir John Ranworth) to his eyes, and looked upriver for any sign of pursuers.

Fred Farman and Bill Hansell were still a long way off, not having yet reached Seven-mile car. But Sam could see the ungainly Fred working frantically at his engines, endeavouring, like the simpleton he was in some ways, to improve the boat's pace by excessive lubrication or by letting too much air into the mixture. This naturally decreased the pace of the racing motor boat, and, through the binoculars, Sam could see Fred gesticulating in a frenzied manner—tossing his absurdly long and bony arms about—while Bill Hansell smoked serenely, and steered with the complacency which all men feel when they find they can guide the course of either a motor boat or a motor car without difficulty.

Sam descended from his perch, and, after par-

taking of one more rum and milk, made his way to the *Dragon-fly*, where Susie was shifting hairpins to rearrange her tresses which the wind caused by the boat's pace had disturbed. In one respect Susie was more fortunate than her friend Polly Young. It was not necessary for her to keep her face shrouded by a motor veil now that she was "once aboard the lugger."

"Well, my dear," said Sam, "we shall have to have a breakdown. They'll never catch us else, and unless we make it appear that some'at is wrong with us they'll get suspicious like. You ha' got to be artful at times like this here. 'Sides," he added, "this here contraption is that complicated that nine times out o' ten it goes wrong when I'm a handlin' of her. Now don't you be afeared if you find we come to a stop before long. I'll get on as far as the swing bridge, and when we are tother side we'll have a little accident as we shan't put right till them others come round the bend and see us. We ha' got to lead em on, ye see, my dear!"

"Lor, Mr. Buttle," said Susie, laughing, "how you do go on a-calling me your dear! What would your wife say?"

"I hain't got no wife," said old Sam, "nor yet I hain't got no little uns. Lor! I reckon if I'd took a wife they'd be big uns by now. I ha' only

got nephews and nieces. As for callin' you my dear, well, that comes natural like! You're a dainty wench, and that's a fact."

"Lor, Mr. Buttle," said Susie, "you make me fare right shy like."

Now Sam, although we have called him old Sam, was still a very fine figure of a man. He was not yet quite sixty. His tightly knit and alert frame was perfect in its contours. He carried himself better than most boys do nowadays. His face was, it is true, weather-worn. But there was not much grey in his black moustache, whiskers, and sharp-pointed beard. Indeed, Sam was a man whom many women, old and young, would have regarded with admiration. But he had never paid much attention to women. His life as a wherryman in winter and as a yacht skipper in summer satisfied him. He liked to "have a mardle" with a pleasant, nice-looking girl. But he was singularly free from that devotion to the other sex which distinguishes most of his sea-going mates. Above all things he liked pluck, in man, woman, boy or girl. And the way in which Susie had entered into his beloved young master's scheme had won his admiration. He was as young at heart as many a boy of twenty is. He began to take more pleasure in Susie's society than he had ever taken in the society

of any "female," as he would have called the members of the divine sex.

"Well, you don't want to be," said Sam. "I'm sure I won't hurt ye."

He touched the throttle lever, and the *Dragon-fly* leapt to the spur. The wind was aft or she would have risen from the water. She was a quaint boat, with wings, not so large as those of an aeroplane but sufficiently extended to give her a lift when she went head to wind. The marshmen called her "the fresher," their name for a young frog, and many and many a discussion had there been in the marshland hostelries as to whether she were entirely the work of natural and normal manufacture or if there was some witchcraft in her building.

The increased pace of the boat threw Susie backwards, but she was saved a fall by Sam's ready arm.

He held the girl for a moment while he steered with the disengaged hand.

Susie seemed content to be held.

"Are ye all right now, my dear?" asked old Sam, with a curious sensation about his heart which worried him. "Do ye fare comfortable?"

Susie shut her eyes and lay back with her weight on Sam's arm for a moment. Then she became all taut wire and released herself with a spring.

"That I was, thank you," she said. "Lor, Mr. Buttle, what a man you are! When I felt your arm round me, I thought you'd ha' squeeged me to death. You *are* strong!"

"I didn't want ye to smash your pretty face against the engine," said Sam, again turning his attention to the hydroplane. "Well, so long as you ain't upset, that's all right."

"Lor!" continued Sam, suddenly, "what am I a-doing? I ought to be a-slowing down, not a-going like this? What can I ha' been thinking of?"

The gallant fellow looked slily at Susie. It was his first attempt at flirtation. He did not know it. But he thought it not unpleasant.

"Why, Mr. Buttle," said Susie, looking at him from beneath her curling eyelashes, "I hope you were not thinking of me so as to forget your duty!"

Sam hesitated. In all truth it had not occurred to him that he had been thinking of the girl.

But he replied in a manner unexpected by Susie. "I reckon," he said, "as I'm a silly old chump. Why, I'm old enow to be your father!"

Susie again looked at him underneath her lashes. "You—you don't look it, Mr. Buttle," she said. "And I'm sure you are stronger and actyvier than most of the fellows I have seen."

"What?" cried Sam, wondering why on earth

he felt so angry. "Have them Smeltby fellows been tryin' their strength on you, seeing how easy they could lift you? Blarm! I'd like to——"

"It can't matter to you, Mr. Buttle," said the girl, mischievously. "But I can take care of myself."

"I'll lay a penny you can! Lord, you've got a heart, you have, to come with me on this here jumping machine, and all for Miss Palmer's sake!"

Now Susie's heart had been very sore at what she rightly believed to be the treachery of Clunes Purchase. She had been infatuated by his wooing for a time. She had grown up with a confidence in her own worth. And she had never imagined that Purchase's intentions towards her were other than honourable. While he indulged in what he regarded as a passing flirtation, with possibly a more tragical ending, she had been seriously considering if she liked him well enough to marry him when he asked her, as she made no doubt he would. Until the previous night Polly Young had avoided the topic of the half-caste with her friend, beyond expressing her own dislike of the man. But last night Polly had thought it best to enlarge Susie's innocent outlook on life. Susie was unlike most of her fellow village girls. And Polly's revelations had first disgusted her, and then made her furious. She had never loved Purchase. But she had fancied she

loved him because he had used all his magnetism to implant this fancy in her. Now she felt outraged, grossly affronted. Had she loved the man, she might have pardoned his pretence at love. As it was, she loathed him and longed to revenge herself. She felt degraded by her folly. She knew her father would take terrible and summary vengeance on any man—gentry, peasantry, or nondescript—who trifled with her affections. But she did not wish to injure Purchase physically. He had done her no wrong beyond giving her a memory of contemptible folly. He had hurt her pride, and it was in his pride ("if he has any," she thought scornfully) that she desired to strike him.

Her heart on the rebound, sickened with the insincerity of the half-caste and the crude lumbering wooing of the village youths (before they had gone to the war) was attracted by this middle-aged man, who treated her with respectful solicitude, without alarming her maidenhood by love-making.

She began to enjoy the motor spin more than ever.

Sam slowed down the *Dragon-fly*. Save when she was racing, the boat stepped a mast some eighteen feet tall.

Sam stopped the engines and headed the boat into the rushes.

"I must see how far they are off," he said. "Don't you be afeared, my dear."

"Lor!" said Susie. "Whatever are you going to do?"

Sam took the binoculars in his teeth by the strap attached to them and began to swarm up the slender mast.

He went up easily, without any show of exertion, and Susie sat gazing at him with admiration and alarm.

"But do you be careful, Mr. Buttle," she cried. "Whatever should I do if you was to topple overboard?"

"Why sit ye still and wait till I swum ashore," laughed Sam, speaking as articulately as the strap in his mouth permitted.

"Well there!" said Susie.

Sam reached the masthead, and caught hold of the truck. Then he held on by one hand while he looked up river through the glasses.

Almost immediately he slid down. "They are a-coming," he said. "Now, my dear, let's get on, and have a breakdown."

He started the boat and let her go slowly down river.

The reach just above Pheasantham swing bridge is a long one, over three-quarters of a mile in the

straight. As soon as Fred Farman entered the reach he would have a view sheer through and underneath the bridge. The other side was the place for the breakdown.

Sam saw that the bridge was open. So strangely fashioned was the *Dragon-fly* that, apart from the height of her mast, he doubted if he could have got her through had the bridge been closed for the passage of a train.

He chuckled as he let her spin slowly under the iron structure, and then, where there was a broad patch of rushes, backed her into the bank.

"Now," said he, "we must play a game. We want them chumps astern to think as we ha' broke down. I must be a-meddlin' about with the engine. Would ye like to step ashore?"

"Without you?" cried Susie. "I'm sure I should not."

Sam looked gratified. Really she was a very nice companion, this girl. He wondered what sort of a wife she would make. He did not regard himself as old, although he had referred to his being old enough to be Susie's father. The man chuckled. Well, it was a rum go for him to go a "springing" with a lass at his time o' life. But it was very pleasant and there was no harm done. Besides, she seemed to like it.

"Can't ye come and sit aside me while we're a waiting?" asked Susie. "That would——"

Sam hesitated. But shook his head. "'Tain't as I don't want to," he said, "but, ye see, you're supposed to be Miss Palmer. Fred Farman may be an innocent. But from what I've seen when I've been up river with the young master he's cute enow for all that. If he saw me sitting beside ye, he'd wonder what was up."

"But ain't you supposed to be nobody, then?" asked Susie.

"I reckon I can't do no play acting," said Sam. "Look, see. Here they come."

Round the distant point spumed the motor boat. Sam waited till he was satisfied that he was seen and that it was believed that he was in difficulties, then he begged Susie to cover her face, "if it ain't too late," he said. "But there! I didn't like to ax ye to cover it again, 'cos why? 'Cos I like to look at it!"

"Lor, Mr. Buttle!" cried Susie, blushing.

Susie, by good luck, got her veil over her face before Fred Farman or Bill Hansell focussed their glasses on her. The boat came roaring down the river, and was within two hundred yards of the bridge when Sam restarted the hydroplane. In a moment the *Dragon-fly* was making pace

down the river, hotly pursued by the motor boat.

It was now past ten, and within half an hour they would be at Duckingham. Sam was annoyed. He hoped that Fred Farman would have come alone. Then it would have been easy to prevent him from landing and meeting Susie face to face.

He did not know that the absence of Bill Hansell from Smeltby was to be of more advantage to his young master's interests than any other chance that had happened that morning.

He was not a man to be easily discouraged. And, in some way he did not yet understand, the presence of Susie put him at his best.

Satisfied that the motor boat would follow him now at whatever pace he went, he let the *Dragon-fly* out, and when he reached the point where the cut turns off to the Thorwater, the Saelig running on under Duckingham Bridge, he again eased her. If possible, he intended to delay his pursuers here. He knew that Fred Farman was no fire-eater and he did not think that Bill Hansell would act as *agent provocateur*. He knew little of Bill. But he knew his family, the members of which had been notorious along the rivers for their pusillanimity.

At the last point before Duckingham Bridge he ran the *Dragon-fly* across the river and let her drift. In his hand he took a repeating rifle which Jack had

given him from the *Belvedere*. He sat amidships, balancing the rifle in his hand, his eyes, with an assumed look of fierceness, scowling upriver.

No sooner did Fred Farman sweep round the point of the reach immediately above Sam's resting-place than he shut off power and swerved into the bank.

"Lor! D'ye see what he's got?" he asked Bill Hansell. "He's got an old gun in his hand. I ain't goin' to be shot at for forty Purchases."

"Nor yet aren't I," said Bill.

"Then let's wait here till he goes on," said Fred. "They can't get away if we keep an eye on them and the orficer at the bridge will soon put a stopper on 'em. And him and his men are all armoured. They ha' got rifles and rewolvers and what not, and we hain't got nothin' but this old pistol."

"I'm willin'," said Bill. "But, Fred, do ye really think that's Miss Mary? I've been lookin' at her, and the one in that there boat seem plumper and shorter than our young lady."

"I don't care if it is or if it ain't," said Fred, "I ain't going to be shot."

"Well, if you're satisfied, I am," said Bill, hoisting out a hamper which he had had the forethought to bring from Smeltby Hall. "Let's you and me have a bit o' victuals. We can always go on when the others do."

So the two pursuers ate and drank while one or the other of them kept an eye on the *Dragon-fly*.

Sam began to dislike being overlooked. He did not know why. But he wished to be alone with Susie, out of the reach of prying eyes. He said as much to the girl, who flushed. "Why, you don't want to do anything anybody mayn't see," she said.

And then Sam took his courage in his hands, and with an effrontery which amazed him more than it did Susie, said, "I want to kiss your pretty face, my dear."

"Lor! You are a mark!" said Susie, at first laughing, and then turning very silent and demure.

"Susie," said Sam in a low voice, "I never saw ye till the tother day when I went up to your father's for a bolt for the cutter's port rigging. But—I ain't a scholard. *You* know."

"I'm afraid I don't," said Susie, in a very low and soft voice.

"Well, do you think as you and I might make a pair of it? Would ye go to church along o' me?" asked Sam.

"Lor! Do ha' done," cried Susie, as Sam reached forward for her hand. "Don't let them see anything!" she said. And then, to assuage the longing for tenderness which had filled her heart ever since Sam brought her her rum and milk and

attended to her so solicitously, she added, " there's a dear ! "

" Blarm ! " cried Sam, leaping up with such a springing joy that he shook the frail boat from stem to stern. " We'll be getting on. I can see the *Belvedere's* main's'l coming past the *Burgh Arms.* Now's our time. And, oh my darling, you and me'll be as happy as the day is long and happier in winter. Lor ! I never thought I should come to it ! But you fare too much for me ! I couldn't do without ye now."

" Nor I without you, Sam," said Susie, very tenderly.

The *Dragon-fly* shot round a point, and there was one more before the reach of Duckingham Bridge was entered. Sam, with his hand on the wheel, bent backwards to the stern where Susie was seated, her heart fluttering, her eyes aglow with surprise and pleasure. She was amazed that she had ever been such a fool about that half-bred nigger. Why, this was a man ! A little older than she was. (So she put it to herself). But a man ! Famous as the best racing skipper on the waters, and though there was no racing during this awful war, well, she was lucky to have won such a man.

It is fair to say that, I believe, Susie was not influenced in her sudden choice by the scarcity of

young men about the villages. And all who know Sam Buttle will admit that, middle-aged as he is, he is a man fit to take the eye of any woman, and to win any woman's heart.

Sam bent back, keeping his equilibrium in a way only a first-class waterman could have done. "Susie," he said. And Susie looked and read his request.

Steadying herself against the side of the boat, she bent forward to meet her lover's lips, and the two good people kissed honestly, and as an earnest of their affection which had sprung up so rapidly and with such promise of sturdy growth.

"You haven't lost any time, Sam," said Susie, still blushing.

"Nor yet hain't young master," said Sam with a laugh. "I reckon there's a pair of us! But here we are."

As they approached the bridge a rifle barrel was thrust through the sides of the structure and a voice bade Sam bring to against the "hard" just above the bridge.

Sam brought to, and presently he and Susie were under arrest.

He made no resistance. He knew what was his master's wish and he had explained to Susie. Together the pair of lovers was marched up in the

care of a man with fixed bayonet, to be held at the *Old Bell* till full inquiry had been made.

When Fred Farman came spinning along close behind he was frightened and puzzled to find the same treatment meted out to him. He and Bill Hansell were marched off, not to the *Old Bell*, but to the *Queen's Head*, on the opposite side of the river. The lieutenant in command thought it important that the two parties should not meet. He was still more important in his self-satisfaction, and he thought how pleased Purchase would be by his capture of the first two.

There was no further need to keep a watch on the river in the interests of Purchase. And when the *Belvedere* was seen swinging round into the cut some half-mile to the south, she passed on her way without being even halted at the bridge over the cut.

She passed on her way with no sign of disturbance aboard.

Yet the cruise had been far from uneventful, and, as Jack said afterwards, but for the Grace of God and the protection of His Son the whole adventure must have ended in fiasco so far as Jack and Mary were concerned.

The narration of the intensely dramatic situation as the *Belvedere* ran before the south-easter to the north must be withheld for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII

ABOARD THE *BELVEDERE*

FOR the first seven miles down river from St. Mary's staith the progress of the *Belvedere* was rapid and without incident.

When the little cutter was well out of sight of the town, Jack called to Nellie Wright to bring Mary out of the cabin and make her comfortable with rugs and cushions in the stern sheets. He thought that the fresh air and the exquisite movement of the swiftly running yacht might do something to arouse her dormant intellect. For though, as always since old Clinker had prayed for her, and appealed to his Master to foil the spells of the priest of Buddha, she was entirely passive, doing everything she was requested but seeming to have no volition of her own, she was clearly not her normal self. There was a vacancy in her eyes which alarmed Jack. It was as though she was looking upon scenes of another world. She was utterly distraught from the world

in which her body dwelt. She gave the impression of an animated Galatea in whom the soul had not yet been born.

This was sufficiently painful for her lover to observe. But he placed high hopes on the effect of the sail.

The morning was brisk, and when the sun rose well above the trees the huge masses of cloud flung their fleeces across the blue of the summer sky in continual changes of formation. The effect of the sun was far more exquisite than it is on a cloudless day. The sheen of the rays as they caught the edges of the clouds and turned them to glimmering masses of snowy white afforded endless variety of effect.

Across the mighty expanse of marshland, stretching for a good fifty miles across the valleys of the Saelig, the Thorwater and the Norwater, the sunbeams gleamed like the rays from some stupendous celestial searchlight, now turning the backs of the grazing kine to a delicious dun red, and now catching the marsh grasses and innumerable wild flowers so that the levels looked like a glistening sheet of moving emerald dotted with jewels of all hues from the white of diamonds to the deep azure of a fine sapphire.

It was a day and a marsh and river scape lovely enough to awake the half dead. Surely, surely,

Jack thought, his beloved would find herself in such air and in such surroundings.

But as the day drew on and the yacht sped further down the river Mary began to show signs of uneasiness rather than symptoms of improvement. It was by God's providence alone that Nellie saw her as she sprang from the stern sheets and was about to leap over the low gunwale into the river. The poor girl's face was contorted. Her eyes were congested. She seemed to be under the influence of some terrible power which was of demoniac origin.

"Can you manage to take her and handle main and jib sheets as well?" Jack asked of Sam Buttle's nephew.

"Lord, master," said the promising youth. "I have brought up a fifteen tonner in half a gale a wind, beating a'most every reach with the tide under me, without another finger to help me. Me handle a little craft like the *Belevedere* as steer as easy as a half rater? Why, it's play!"

So Jack gave up the tiller to young Buttle and seated himself beside Mary, hoping that his presence might serve to calm her.

But his proximity seemed to incense her. She shrank from him, with pitiful little cries of alarm There was a look of horror and disgust in her eyes

when they dwelt on him which struck him to the heart, though he knew very well that she was not responsible either for her looks or her actions.

As yet she had not spoken articulately. But as the cutter was heaping up a foaming bow wave to leap over the staith against the *Burgh Arms* words issued from her mouth, though in a voice which at first Jack thought he had never heard before. It certainly bore no resemblance to the sweet melody of that voice which had so charmed him when first he saw her lovely face rising above the wall of the mysterious house wherein she had been kept virtually a prisoner.

"I will not remain. I must go to him—to him. He took me. I must go to him."

She sprang up, and Jack was just in time to fling his arms round her and force her with gentle insistency to resume her seat. Still she struggled. Jack was at his wits' end what to do. If this new attack continued, how should he act when the yacht came to the bridge over the cut? There he would have to go slowly, while the bridge-keeper lowered the bag at the end of the long stave in which he gathered the tolls from the passing craft, the craft which needed the bridge to be opened for their passage.

Even if he placed her again in the cabin her cries would alarm the man, and until he knew what had

happened to the Rolls-Royce and the *Dragon-fly* and their crews he dared not invite attention. Buckingham Bridge was not far off by the road which passed across the bridge over the cut, and the officer in control of the picket there was a friend of Purchase. It was not that Jack feared the result of inquiry, but there was always the difficulty confronting him, that Purchase had the authority of the Princess to back him, and the Princess was the legal guardian of Mary until her authority had been revoked by General Blunderfield. Had Mary been in her normal state, in her own proper senses, the situation would not have been so critical. But as she then was, no one, who had not a knowledge of the incredible facts, would believe that she was not an insane person who ought to be in the custody of her legal guardian. Though Jack knew, and had many a time tipped, the local policeman, John Noggin, yet he doubted if that genial constable's good will would go so far as to contribute to the escape of a girl in Mary's condition from the custody in which her grandfather had placed her.

"I've half a mind to bring up in one of the loneliest reaches," he said to Nellie. "We can't pass Dingleton Bridge like this. But if I bring to it will waste time, and every minute is of consequence. I hope Bob has managed to lead Purchase

on a wild-goose chase. But I don't know. I hope that the picket at Duckingham Bridge is satisfied with the capture of Sam and Susie Platt. But again I don't know. If only I knew what had happened to our decoy parties I could act more freely. As it is I think I must push on as fast as I can. Can't you do anything, Nellie?"

Nellie shook her head. "No," she said, "I ain't like old Clinker. He's used to prayin' fervent and as if he meant it, as he does. I'm ashamed of myself, sir. But I can't do that. It ain't that I don't believe in God or that I don't say my prayers. But I can't do as old Clinker does."

"God help us then," said Jack. He took Mary's hands from the clasp in which Nellie was holding them. "Mary," he said, and his voice had the pathos and appeal in it of a Beethoven largo—"Mary, don't you know me? I am saving you as we arranged, getting you away from that horrible house you begged me to release you from. Mary, look at me."

But the eyes that turned madly hither and thither had no recognition in them when they chanced to meet his.

The cutter ran on, and still Mary's condition did not improve. If anything it grew worse, so that Jack was constrained against his will to consent to

Nellie's suggestion that Mary should be bound with a shawl cut into strips, and laid on one of the seats in the cabin. This only served to make her outcry more vehement. It was difficult to understand what she said. Now and then Jack thought he caught words of a foreign language, words like the Hindustanee he had heard his father use when telling some story to an old brother officer who had served in India.

The yacht came to the sharp bend where the cut runs out of the Saelig. In less than a quarter of a mile they would have to pass beneath Dingleton Bridge. Away to starboard Duckingham Bridge was very plainly visible in the strong light. Ah! Was all well there? Were Sam and Susie under arrest?

"Can ye give us a hand now, sir?" asked young Buttle, putting his head inside the cabin door while he hung on to the tiller with the tips of his fingers. "We're close against the bridge."

Jack groaned as he rose. But even as he rose a wonderful change came over Mary. Her face resumed its normal sweet expression; her lips ceased to work, her eyes to roll. The hideous gabble of incomprehensible jargon which issued from her throat, intermingled with harsh screams, ceased. She lay back, weak, but herself.

"Captain Ranworth?" she said. "Oh! You have got me away! Thank God. But how? How did I come here?"

"Come on, please, sir," said young Buttle. "I must lower sail. She'd catch her gaff against the bridge in this wind if we went through as we are."

Though he hurried from the cabin with a last look back, Jack found time to thank God Almighty in that He had restored the beloved girl to her senses.

How had the miracle come about? What was the cause of the sudden change from horror to happiness?

CHAPTER XXIV

THE REASON OF THE CHANGE

AT Smeltby Shri Gunga Ram had mused late after his interview with the Princess. The dignity of a true Brahmin Yogi, even though he has crossed the black water, is not a thing to be played with. Clunes Purchase had caused an offence far deeper than he had any notion of, though he was a pretty hater himself, and ready enough to show indignation with any one who was not his superior financially or in position. The Yogi had retired to his apartments, sulking, like Achilles in his tent. He declared that he would do no more. He had used his powers to make Mary passive. And he almost regretted that he had done so. But that he looked to a great profit for his monastery to accrue from the girl's marriage with Clunes Purchase he would never have interfered. It was in vain that the Princess pleaded for more active interference on his part. He told himself that he was rapt in meditation, preparing himself to rise to the next

circle of existence. And he almost believed it. He dismissed the Princess with no definite promise, and reposed himself again.

He sat brooding, and part of the time in a real reverie of the meditation, the intense absorption of which he and his like were capable, till the darkness of night began to shudder away from the first suggestion of dawn. Then he reclined himself on the Eastern divan on which he usually slept when he felt justified in giving so much care to the comfort of his earthly disguise, as he considered his body to be. But ascetic and adept as he was, he could not entirely master the demands of exhausted nature. He slept, and slept long and heavily. Whether or not his astral form revisited the temple of his monastery no one but himself knows. He told himself that it had done so, when he awoke when the sun was high on the following morning. He also told himself that he had received an order from the chief priest that he was to do his utmost to bring Mary in subjection to the half-caste.

He knew the limitations of his powers. He seated himself again, and threw, or imagined that he threw, himself into a kind of trance. Certainly he produced a condition of coma. And for some minutes he lay like one dead upon his divan.

When he came to himself his brow was puckered.

He tapped the gong which answered him for a bell, and presently he heard the voice of the maid Emma outside his door. Emma had consented to listen to his orders from the passage without. But she said that rather than enter the Yogi's apartments when he was there she would give warning. It was not that she feared his attentions. The man was too inhuman to permit a girl to be alarmed by such fears, but that she felt that there was something unholy, something unchristian in those strange rooms, where Buddhist idols stood, where Shiva and Kali were represented in hideous jade sculptures.

In reply to Gunga Ram's questions Emma told him that her mistress and Purchase had set out early with the high power car. She did not think it necessary to mention that Tom Hale had gone with the Darracq, or that Bob Hansell was not to be found. Emma herself was in the dark as to what was going on. Indeed, afterwards she said that she did not know that the lunatics were locked in their suite of rooms without a guard.

Shri Gunga dismissed her from her stand outside his door. He prepared his meagre breakfast at the little fire which was always burning on a stone hearth beneath the chimney of his chief apartment. He ate his grains of rice and parched wheat, and drank the milk which Emma had placed outside his door.

Then, after he had repeated the prayers after food, he swathed himself as usual, and stalked out into the park, his head bent in meditation to the ground.

He felt more master of his powers outdoors. He made his way, with his dignified stealthy stride, towards the thickets beside the wall, and here he seated himself on the stump of a fallen tree, and closed his eyes.

Presently he rose, and waved his arms thrice.

It was now between ten and eleven, and the *Belvedere* was passing Burgh Staith.

He mumbled his exorcisms, but half fearfully. He had known that once again the power of Krishna had defeated him. He had known that the simple and earnest piety of old Clinker had smashed the cord which enabled him to make Mary dance and twitch as the wire of a marionette enables the showman to make the figure dance.

And he was uneasy. What if he were wrong! What if there were indeed a greater than the Lord Siddartha, than the mighty Buddh?

But his education was too strong for him to admit this possibility in a general way. He was however coming to the conclusion that in the West and in Christian countries, where his faith in Buddh met with an equally strong and pure faith in Krishna,

the great Eastern God had no power over the true believers in the Saviour of the Western. He could not, would not admit that the power of the Saviour of the West was as potent in the East as in the West. Even the admission he made would have been sufficient to cause him to be degraded and to lose all caste among the twice born of Ind had he made it to a Brahman whose word would be taken as evidence against one with so holy a reputation as his.

However, so far as his mystic powers of self-protection were concerned, he believed that he had suffered no loss.

Seated on the tree-stump he gave his whole entity up to an intense concentration.

And he saw.

He saw Mary sitting in the stern sheets of the *Belvedere*, and he recognized with the satisfaction which an artist has in gazing upon one of his master-pieces, that the girl was still subject to his influence. He understood the blankness of her expression, the deadness of her eyes, though neither Jack nor Nellie Wright comprehended them. Jack may have had a dim suspicion, but nothing more. And Shri Gunga knew it.

He bent all the powers of his will upon the unhappy girl. Rather than she should escape in safety with

the Feringhee, it would be better that she should die. In that case Purchase might, by some underhand method, gain possession of the treasure of which he knew. Or if not Purchase, the Princess. And then his, Shri Gunga's, monastery would reap the benefit. For he knew that he had almost unlimited control over the Princess if he chose to exercise it.

He kept his will bent on the girl in his state of semi-trance. To his surroundings he was deaf and blind. He heard nothing, saw nothing but the yacht and her crew. He visualized Mary clearly, though he could not so plainly see the others aboard.

It was while he was exerting all his hypnotic force that Mary grew restive, grew dangerous aboard the yacht. He saw his success and told himself that it was only a matter of time and he would force her to leap overboard into the river or to compel her guardians to return with her to Smeltby.

Up in the quarters allotted to the lunatics the two brothers raved. They had not been fed. They were left hungry and raging, locked in their rooms.

The doors were strengthened with iron bands. Many a time had they endeavoured to burst through them, but always in vain. And although these poor if horrible creatures were insane they were able to remember such a thing as a failure, a total and

hopeless failure to burst through a confining obstacle.

The windows were barred with iron, and all save one were small.

One, however, was large enough to permit the egress of both of them together if once they could burst open the bars.

They had never before tried the windows, and consequently their keepers had reasoned that they never would. Tom Hale and Bill Hansell considered that they had enough to do to look after their revolting charges without testing every outlet day by day. The bars of the large window had never been tested since the insane creatures were children. And the window looked to the south-west, the quarter from whence comes rain, and rain means rust and decay.

Although the two sons of the Princess were brutally insane, were homicidal and bloodthirsty, yet they were not without the power of reasoning on occasion. They could not speak intelligibly. But they could understand each other by mutual looks.

They stood beneath the window and the elder and stronger of the two bent his back so that his brother could mount upon it.

This the latter did, and in a moment was wrestling with the iron bars. Both were mad with hunger,

the agony which affects mad people more than any other.

A hoarse scream of triumph came howling from the lips of the upper of the two when he felt one of the bars give in his tremendous grip. Like all madmen of their class of insanity, they were both enormously muscular and nervously powerful. Probably but for the moral fear, the fear of the whip wielded by their keepers, and the fear of certain ghastly punishments which had been meted out to them by the two men who had grown callous from tedium and disgust, they would have killed their warders long ago.

Now they were ravening for food, mad with fury at the neglect to provide them with their customary morning meal.

With a yell of triumph, which sounded through the house and sent Emma shuddering with terror to the cook, the first bar was wrenched from its place. Encouraged, the operator started on the second with increased vigour, and presently that too came out of its bed with a screech and tearing of wood.

One more, and there was space for their escape.

That one took less time than the other two, and when it came crashing down the two poor creatures danced about the floor, uttering horrible yells of

delight, as they grimaced in each other's faces and performed all kinds of unsightly gestures and gambols.

At length, as though with one accord, the elder again supported himself against the wall, while his brother clambered on his back. In a trice the latter was through the window. He was sufficiently sane to remember to turn back and hold out his hand for his brother to clasp. A leap and a heave and the two brothers were together.

The window through which they had made their way looked out on the park. Beneath it was the roof of an outhouse, but a few feet below the outer window ledge.

In a moment they had dropped on this roof, and were clambering to a corner of the outhouse. From this a rain-pipe ran down to earth, and the two slid down this as easily as a brace of gorillas would have slid—and possibly with much the same emotions.

As they dropped to earth they caught sight of the Yogi, who was striding majestically in the direction of the thicket under the wall.

The inhumanity of the treatment to which they had been subjected had prevented these piteous creatures from ever having experienced the most divine of all emotions, Love. But if they could not love, they could hate. Their powers in this direc-

tion were well developed. And above all they hated the Yogi. In their unreasoning way they attributed most of their ills to this man. They had seen the respect paid him, and they thought that he must be the master who had caused them to be whipped, to suffer other punishments and indignities.

For some time they remained on all-fours as they had dropped from the rain-pipe. They looked each other full in the face, and their hideous features wrinkled in a common understanding.

As though stirred by one will they moved off, still on all-fours, creeping like apes, as swiftly and as noiselessly.

The servants were all at the back, shuddering with terror at the sounds they had heard proceeding from the quarters of the lunatics.

Swiftly they made their way across the grass of the park to the fringe of the thicket against the wall. They looked about them, sniffing like animals. They thrust their way in perfect silence through the undergrowth.

At last they again came in sight of Shri Gunga Ram, then seated in profound meditation on the tree-stump, his every faculty absorbed then on influencing Mary to drown herself.

Again a look of mutual intelligence, if it may be called intelligence, passed between them.

One crawled to the right, one to the left. With the inexorability of fate they closed in upon their intended victim.

Only for the fraction of a minute did they hesitate, and then again they hesitated with a kind of mutual instinct, a kind of thought transference. They feared this man so. Would fear or hatred prove the stronger? A sudden set of the mouth and gleam of the eyes would have informed an observant onlooker which was to be the dominant influence, fear or hatred.

As one they leapt upon the Yogi. As one they tore at him. He died unconscious of what was upon him, so sudden and so tremendous was their onset.

And there we must leave them, capering, exulting in their victory over the loathed man.

It was at the moment when the two mad creatures sprang upon Shri Gunga that Mary came to herself.

And within a few minutes Jack was bending over her. "No more fear, dear, no more pain. You are safe now, safe."

And indeed a danger had been removed for ever of which neither of these two happy young lovers was cognisant.

Never again would Mary need to fear the spells of Shri Gunga.

CHAPTER XXV

SAFE AT THE END

WHEN Mary came to herself aboard the *Belvedere* the cutter was within a hundred yards of Dingleton Bridge with a lot of way upon her. Jack hardly had time to press his darling's hand and reassure her as to her safety when he was compelled to go from her to help young Buttle to lower the main's'l. Under her jib with a following wind, the little craft sped on smoothly and rapidly beneath the yawning halves of the bridge which gaped above the cut. The bridge-keeper, a porter of the railway that ran along the cut, reached over with the collecting bag, and never did Jack drop his money in that bag with so joyous a heart as on that morning. He was well known throughout the waters of Daneshire and the porter greeted him cheerily. "Beautiful mornin', sir," he said, seeing that Jack had added a tip to the regulation charge for having the bridge opened. "Beautiful."

"I should think it was," cried Jack, with enthus-

iasm. " I never knew such a beautiful morning."

There was a fervour in his words which made the porter stare. But " it worn't none of his business," and he had received the price of two pints as a present to himself. He was content.

With a cheery " yeo, heave ho " Jack and young Buttle hoisted the main's'l up again and presently the cutter was foaming along the narrow cut towards Rushingham, the freshening breeze dead astern, and " all well aboard."

" You can hold her now, can't you ? " Jack asked young Buttle.

That wise youth responded with his usual grin, perhaps a little accentuated. " Course I can," he replied.

So Jack returned to Mary's side, seated himself by her and took her hand, and gradually, testing her endurance, he told her as much as he thought advisable of the story of her rescue.

He feared lest the girl's cheek might blanch and she might give way to nervous weakness. But as he went on to tell her how events had fallen out he was delighted to see that her colour rose and her eyes brightened. And then she took his hand in her own soft palm. " How can I ever thank you enough ? ' she said.

Young Buttle was well back astern, his attention

fully occupied with the tiller and the sheets. Nellie looked at Jack and Mary for a moment and then stole outside the cabin.

"Dear," said Jack, greatly daring, "I think you know. In less than two hours we shall be with my father and perhaps your grandfather. If I ask your grandfather for the greatest thing he has to give, and he consents, will you consent too? Oh Mary, ever since that day when I first saw your dear face over the wall you have lived in my heart alone. I'm not much of a chap——"

But herein Mary interposed. "How dare you say so!" she cried. "You whom all Daneshire honours! And how dare you insult the man I—I——" She did not speak the word, but her rosy face supplied the missing monosyllable.

Jack took a swift look out at young Buttle. That worthy, wise in his generation, had his eyes firmly fixed on the yacht's burgee, as though he were intent on watching the shifts of wind.

Swiftly Jack drew Mary's yielding form to him and swiftly he took that first kiss which was ever to remain a sacred memory to him. And the girl yielded up her lips, and her own kiss responded to her lover's. They joined the others in the steer sheets.

It was rather a triumphant progress than a mere

sail from the cut, up river to Quantly Red House. Although he fretted at the constraint he had to impose upon himself because of the presence of young Buttle in the stern sheets at the tiller, yet Jack's heart was content, his song of happy love rang through his being. He forgot the tribulations which his associates in the Rolls-Royce and the *Dragon-fly* might be suffering. His world for the time was in the little cutter.

Neither he nor Mary troubled their heads to wonder why she had suddenly recovered from her curious condition. They were happy in their love, Naught else mattered.

And when they brought to at the Red House staith and found Sir John awaiting them with a very fine-looking old gentleman in khaki by his side, and heard the grandfather's thanks to the Captain for rescuing his granddaughter from a life which might have become worse than death, there was nothing left for them to wish for.

Young Buttle was to escort Nellie back to St. Mary's by train after he had moored the cutter and made her ship-shape. Never did a happier party fill a high-power car than the quartette which whirled from Quantley to Chittenham.

And when they found telegrams at Chittenham announcing the safe return of Bob Mallett and Polly

Young to St. Mary's, and the discomfiture of the enemy, there seemed nothing left to wish for. The discovery by the officer commanding the picket at Duckingham that Susie Platt was not Mary, and that he had no justification for keeping her and Sam under arrest, soon set that pair free.

They returned to St. Mary's in the *Dragon-fly*, but for some reason or other they took the whole of that lovely afternoon to make the trip, and when they landed at St. Mary's staith Sam had persuaded Susie that he was made for her and she for him.

Of course Bob Mallett and Polly came to an understanding on their way home from Goddelby, so that only Nellie, of the three girl assistants, seemed to be left out in the cold. But she did not feel discontented. She had promised to walk out with young Buttle on the following Sunday, and the results of that one day's strenuous adventure ultimately promised four marriages.

The General proved to be a charming old gentleman, delighted to find that his granddaughter had won the love of so satisfactory a young soldier as Jack Ranworth. It was he who enlightened Jack and Mary as to the probable cause of the conspiracy against them. For he knew all about the £200,000 which had been invested in India by

Colonel Palmer for his daughter's benefit. The General had not mentioned it because he thought it better that the Princess should be ignorant of the fortune. It was not chance that brought the son of the Madras merchant who knew of the fortune to Smeltby, but a carefully thought out plan devised between father and son before ever the latter came to England.

On the following day, when all had been narrated and discussed more than once, and every one at Chittenham was in the seventh heaven—Shri Gunga's Nirvana—of happiness, Bob Mallett returned, slowly riding Kitchener. Jack and Mary were strolling together near the home paddock when they saw Bob ride up the drive.

Mary ran towards the horse and stroked his nose: "You dear," she said, with a glance at Jack which set his heart beating, "you dear, to bring him to me!"

And Jack too fondled the horse. For both he and his beloved felt that the noble chestnut had a large share in promoting the happiness which now enveloped them like a garment.

The General refused to stay longer at Chittenham than one night before he went to Smeltby. There he found everything in a state of confusion. The bodies of the two unhappy lunatics had been found

drowned in the river. Shri Gunga's dreadfully mutilated body was discovered by Fred Farman and Bill Hansell while they were seeking for the madmen through the grounds. The Princess on her return had heard of the tragedies and had fled, leaving no message or address behind her. She was never again heard of by her husband, and probably she is now in India, if she succeeded in getting aboard a ship bound for that dependency.

If not, her fate cannot be surmised.

Clunes Purchase had fled from the wrath to come. His place was shut up, and he disappeared from the ken of all who knew him in Daneshire.

The General closed the Walled-in House until Bob married Polly Young, when he installed the two as caretakers. At first Polly used to express a fear lest the house might be haunted. But Bob soon laughed her out of that notion and lived there happily enough, till a Zeppelin dropped a bomb on the building, fortunately without injuring either husband or wife. After that they went to Chittenham where Bob resumed his position as groom and Polly became the assistant of the housekeeper, who was getting very old. Since then Bob has "joined up" and gone out with his young master to fight.

After that old Peter gave up his inn and went to

live at Chittenham lodge with Polly, to comfort her during her husband's absence.

The General threw no difficulties in the way of an early marriage between Jack and Mary. He knew that the young fellow must needs rejoin before long, and he wished him to leave a hope of posterity behind him. I am glad to say that as yet the gallant Jack has come through his second campaign scatheless. He attributes it to his faith in the Protector of us all, and to the sincerity of the prayers which he knows his wife offers up for him not only night and morning but during every moment of her waking hours.

Sam and Susie have a cottage on the Chittenham estate, and Sam is supposed to be guardian of the water craft. But his berth during the war is really a sinecure, though he does his duty as special constable.

Sir John and the General have become great friends, and the General spends all the time he can spare from his military duties at Chittenham.

It would be difficult to say which of his grandfathers spoils the boy born in the autumn of 1916 the more. Each accuses the other of senile folly in his apparent worship of that as yet insensible atom of humanity.

Kitchener, greatly condescending, but with the gallantry of a noble horse, has consented to carry a habit. And one of Mary's great pleasures, when she can spare an hour from her infant phenomenon, is to ride the horse about the lovely country of her husband's home.

The Rolls-Royce, alas ! has been sacrificed to the urgency of war, and is now used by some young despatch bearers on the General Headquarters Staff, who are friends of its former owner.

Nellie Wright on one occasion asked old Clinker to prophesy the future. At first he was furious. But at last he stroked her head very tenderly, and said, " So long as Master Jack and his dear lady do right and trust in the Lord I doubt they'll come to no harm. Without His help we are but as straws in the wind. But they both of 'em have faithful hearts and I see, ay ! I see them living to a happy old age together at old Chittenham Hall, with their children grown up and causing 'em pride instead of anxiety and sorrow. Ay ! I see it, and I am glad to see it. For they are brave, faithful and devout. And of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Nellie, a little awed, escaped from the old man, and went to tell young Buttle.

Before that promising youth left for the Mine Sweeper for which he had volunteered, he had

"made things right" with Nellie. And, if he comes back safely, there will be one more marriage arising out of that curious day of adventure which old Peter called "Find the lady."

THE END

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